

NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL

Monterey, California



THESIS

THE DEVELOPMENT OF CENTRAL ASIA THROUGH THE MIDDLE EAST

by

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December 2001

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Report Documentation Page

Report Date 19 Dec 2001	Report Type N/A	Dates Covered (from... to) -
Title and Subtitle The Development of Central Asia Through the Middle East		Contract Number
		Grant Number
		Program Element Number
Author(s) Santiago, Gerald-James		Project Number
		Task Number
		Work Unit Number
Performing Organization Name(s) and Address(es) Naval Postgraduate School Monterey, California		Performing Organization Report Number
Sponsoring/Monitoring Agency Name(s) and Address(es)		Sponsor/Monitor's Acronym(s)
		Sponsor/Monitor's Report Number(s)
Distribution/Availability Statement Approved for public release, distribution unlimited		
Supplementary Notes The original document contains color images.		
Abstract		
Subject Terms		
Report Classification unclassified	Classification of this page unclassified	
Classification of Abstract unclassified	Limitation of Abstract UU	
Number of Pages 74		

REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE			<i>Form Approved OMB No. 0704-0188</i>	
Public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instruction, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to Washington headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports, 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington, VA 22202-4302, and to the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reduction Project (0704-0188) Washington DC 20503.				
1. AGENCY USE ONLY (Leave blank)		2. REPORT DATE December 2001	3. REPORT TYPE AND DATES COVERED Master's Thesis	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE: The Development of Central Asia through the Middle East			5. FUNDING NUMBERS	
6. AUTHOR(S) Gerald-James M. Santiago				
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) Naval Postgraduate School Monterey, CA 93943-5000			8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER	
9. SPONSORING /MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) N/A			10. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY REPORT NUMBER	
11. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES The views expressed in this thesis are those of the author and do not reflect the official policy or position of the Department of Defense or the U.S. Government.				
12a. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Distribution Statement (mix case letters) Approved for public release; distribution is unlimited			12b. DISTRIBUTION CODE	
13. ABSTRACT (maximum 200 words) This thesis contends that the Central Asian states of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan, and the Caucasian state of Azerbaijan will continue to be developed through the Middle East because of the ethnic, religious, cultural, and historical ties each republic holds with the region. Despite the perceived threat of Islamic fundamentalism, the Central Asian states and Azerbaijan will still seek foreign aid from the Middle East while attempting to mitigate the influence of foreign powers in their internal affairs. Because of growing US interests in Central Asia and the Caspian Sea area, the US will seek to be become engaged and to expand its influence in the region through its Middle East ally, Turkey. Growing US and Turkish influence will come at the expense of the former regional hegemon, Russia, and the historic Middle East power, Iran. This complex interaction between old and new powers has the potential of leading to conflict. An understanding of this complex relationship is important to any country that has an interest in the region.				
14. SUBJECT TERMS Central Asia, Caucasia, Middle East, Russia, Turkey, Iran, United States, Nagorno-Karabakh, Islamic fundamentalism			15. NUMBER OF PAGES 74	
			16. PRICE CODE	
17. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF REPORT Unclassified	18. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF THIS PAGE Unclassified	19. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF ABSTRACT Unclassified	20. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT UL	

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THE DEVELOPMENT OF CENTRAL ASIA THROUGH THE MIDDLE EAST

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Lieutenant, United States Navy
B.S., United States Naval Academy, 1995

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS IN NATIONAL SECURITY AFFAIRS

from the

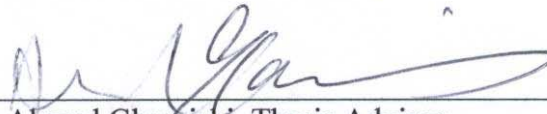
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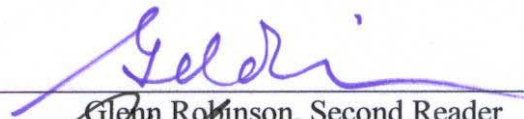


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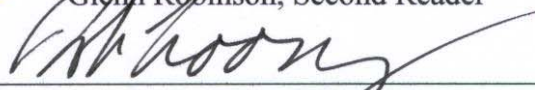
Approved by:



Ahmad Ghoreishi, Thesis Advisor



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James Wirtz, Chairman
National Security Affairs Department

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ABSTRACT

This thesis contends that the Central Asian states of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan, and the Caucasian state of Azerbaijan will continue to be developed through the Middle East because of the ethnic, religious, cultural, and historical ties each republic holds with the region. Despite the perceived threat of Islamic fundamentalism, the Central Asian states and Azerbaijan will still seek foreign aid from the Middle East while attempting to mitigate the influence of foreign powers in their internal affairs. Because of growing US interests in Central Asia and the Caspian Sea area, the US will seek to become engaged and to expand its influence in the region through its Middle East ally, Turkey. Growing US and Turkish influence will come at the expense of the former regional hegemon, Russia, and the historic Middle East power, Iran. This complex interaction between old and new powers has the potential of leading to conflict. An understanding of this complex relationship is important to any country that has an interest in the region.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank Professor Ahmad Ghoreishi for his patience in teaching me about the Middle East, a region I knew nothing about before attending his classes. I would also like to express my appreciation to Professor Glenn Robinson, whose sincere critique and instruction allowed me to complete this thesis (and helped me define the real conspiracies from the imagined ones).

I will be eternally grateful to my parents for their love and support throughout all my endeavors, to my brother, Glenn, for his enthusiasm and interest in the subject, to my sister, Ethel, and my brother-in-law, Sean, who helped me keep an open mind, and to my nephew, Lucas, who reminded me that things really are simple.

Finally, I would to thank my friend, Crystal Glasgow, who kept me sane through some long nights.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

With their independence in 1991 from the former Soviet Union, the Central Asian states of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan, and the Caucasian state of Azerbaijan each faced serious challenges in their struggle to build new nations. With ethnic, cultural, historic, linguistic, and religious ties with the Middle East, the governments of these states looked towards the Middle East in their development.

However, as the regimes encountered the problems of nation building, the ethnic diversity of the region, with many groups having ties with the Middle East, and the rapid growth of Islamic fundamentalism further destabilized what little security each of the governments held. The governments responded by adapting harsh measures and mitigating the influence of Middle Eastern powers into each of their states. This suppression of democracy was ignored by the West as it also feared the growth of a fundamentalist state in Central Asia.

Encouraged by the West, the new states sought a secular, Middle East state to use as a model for development. In Turkey, they found a secular model of government and a bridge to the Western world and the United States. Turkish and US influence continues to grow within the region at the expense of the historic Middle East power, Iran, and the former regional hegemon, Russia.

This growing friction between the regional powers and the US, however, has not been limited to the economic field. In the Armenia-Azerbaijan dispute over Nagorno-Karabakh, each of the regional powers were drawn into the war because of geopolitical interests and security concerns. The United States, allied with Turkey, aligned itself against Russia and Iran. As the dispute was internationalized, the local conflict had the potential to become a regional war that arrayed a US ally and NATO member against a nuclear-armed, former superpower. Nagorno-Karabkh set a dangerous precedent on how future conflicts would be handled by the regional powers and the United States.

Because of their shared ethnic, cultural, historical, and religious ties, the Central Asian states and Azerbaijan will continue to rely on the Middle East for their development. However, because of geopolitical interests and security concerns, this

complex, evolving relationship could lead to future conflict. Any country that has an interest in Central Asia and Caucasia must understand this interaction and relationship.

I. INTRODUCTION

A. DESCRIPTION

This thesis will argue that the Central Asian states of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan, and the Caucasian state of Azerbaijan will continue to be developed through the Middle East because of the ethnic, religious, cultural, and historical ties each republic holds with the region. Despite the perceived threat of Islamic fundamentalism, the Central Asian states and Azerbaijan will still seek foreign aid from the Middle East while attempting to mitigate the influence of foreign powers in their internal affairs. Because of growing US interests in Central Asia and the Caspian Sea area, the US will seek to become engaged and to expand its influence in the region through its Middle East ally, Turkey. Growing US and Turkish influence will come at the expense of the former regional hegemon, Russia, and the historic Middle East power, Iran. This complex interaction between old and new powers has the potential of leading to conflict. An understanding of this complex relationship is important to any country that has an interest in the region.

In 1991, after the breakup of the Soviet Union, the Central Asian republics of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan, and the Caucasian state of Azerbaijan were faced for the first time with the prospect of existence as independent states. In many respects, they were unprepared for this event. Serious political, economic, ethnic, and religious challenges confronted the new states as each faced the prospect of building strong political, economic, and social institutions that were capable of supporting an independent country.

After independence, only Soviet-era political structures remained behind, and the collapse of the Soviet Union fragmented the armed forces that still remained in each of the republics' territories. Ethnic and religious diversity, controlled under the Soviet rule, were now brought to the fore. The economies of the republics, used during the Soviet era to supply raw materials, now faced the problem of integrating into the global system as independent entities.

Even after ten years, stability within Central Asia and Caucasia remains in flux. The governments in place, while allowing for some political participation, have made slow progress in moving away from the Soviet model of a strong, one party central government. Few governments have achieved the legitimacy needed to consolidate and to stabilize their regimes. Because of this, the states are highly susceptible to outside influences, as each regime tries to stabilize its political base in order to remain in power.

During the Soviet period when Moscow closed the Central Asian and Transcaucasian states from foreign powers, Middle Eastern influence was minimal. With independence, old ties with the Middle East were renewed, bringing the republics new pressures. With many of the states having significant Muslim populations and many having ethnic, cultural, historical, and linguistic ties to the Middle East, the governments looked to the Middle East to help them emerge from the Cold War. However, each also sought to balance their need for foreign aid with their new freedom away from the influence of any foreign powers. Of the Middle Eastern states, Turkey and Iran play the most important roles, as each has old ties with many of the new states and each shares significant borders with Caucasia and Central Asia.

Influence in the region for Turkey and Iran, however, is not uncontested. As sovereign states with differing national goals, Turkey and Iran sometimes have conflicting interests in the development of the region. With the economic potential of the Caspian region, the United States has also increased its presence in the area through its NATO ally, Turkey. However, because of the continuing tension between the United States and Iran left over from the Iranian Revolution, what role Iran will play in US foreign policy remains to be seen. Russia, the former hegemon of the region, still regards Central Asia and Caucasia to be within its sphere of influence and is very wary of any outside influence that detract from its power there.

This complex interaction has led and will lead to conflict. Although the chance of military confrontation by outside powers within the region seems remote, the possibility does exist. With increased foreign interests within the region, the governments of each state see the potential of harnessing outside powers for their own interests. Concurrently,

foreign powers are also willing to use the instruments of international diplomacy and power to further their own interests within the region.

B. METHODOLOGY

The research for this thesis will come from a variety of primary and secondary sources. It will use the history of Central Asia and Caucasia, and the history of Middle Eastern and Russian interaction in the region as a guide for future developments. The thesis will make use of books, scholarly articles, web sites, newspaper articles, and government transcripts as research sources about the evolving ethnic, religious, and political climate in the region.

C. ORGANIZATION

Chapter II examines how ethnic diversity and Islamic fundamentalism became sources of instability for the regimes of the Central Asian states and Azerbaijan after independence. The chapter will show how the ethnic layout of Central Asia and Caucasia did not correspond to the any of the national borders of the new states, placing added pressure on the governments as they struggled to create national identities. The chapter will also show how the growth of Islamic fundamentalism, fueled by Middle Eastern foreign powers, contributed to the insecurities of the regimes, causing them to react by becoming more authoritarian in order to retain power and to attract foreign aid while mitigating the influence of undesirable foreign elements in the affairs of the individual states.

Chapter III will examine the roles the Middle East states of Turkey and Iran have in the development of Central Asia and Azerbaijan. The chapter will show how these states are influenced by ties to the Turkey and Iran, and how the governments look to Turkey as a model of secular development while remaining wary of Iran's fundamentalist ideology. The chapter will also examine growing US influence in the region through Turkey and "pipeline politics," and how this affects the United States' relationships with Russia, the former regional power during the Cold War, and Iran, a historic power in Central Asia and Caucasia.

Chapter IV is a case study of the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict over the region of Nagorno-Karabakh. The chapter will show how Nagorno-Karabakh is a possible precursor of future conflict within the region as the belligerent states have used foreign

powers and evolving blocs and alliances to their advantage. An in-depth study, specific to Nagorno-Karabakh, of the internal problems and national ambitions the belligerent states hold, and the security concerns and national interests of Turkey, Iran, and Russia will show how these regional powers and the United States were drawn into the conflict.

Chapter V integrates the various factors that have played a role in the development of the Central Asian states and Azerbaijan after 1991. It offers informed conclusions about how the ties Central Asia and the Middle East share together have influenced the nation-building process of the new states. It concludes that because of their shared ethnic, cultural, historical, linguistic and religious ties, these states will continue to rely on the Middle East for their development. However, this complex, evolving relationship could lead to future conflict as the regional powers, along with the United States, advance their geopolitical interests and address their security concerns.



Figure 1. Central Asia and Caucasia (From Microsoft Encarta Reference Suite 2000)

II. THE EVOLUTION OF THE CENTRAL ASIAN STATES: ETHNIC DIVERSITY AND ISLAMIC FUNDAMENTALISM

A. INTRODUCTION

For the new Central Asian republics undergoing the process of nation building, ethnic diversity and Islamic fundamentalism immediately became sources of instability for each of the regimes following the collapse of the Soviet Union. Because no nation-states existed in the centuries before the Russian conquests and because the post-Soviet states are defined by the arbitrary borders created by Stalin during the Soviet era, the lines of demarcation between the states fail to correspond to the ethnic situation in the region. With independence, an Islamic revival began in the region as religion, long suppressed under communist rule, was allowed to flourish. However, with the politicization of Islam in the opposition parties in each of the new republics, the regimes increasingly saw the growth of Islamic fundamentalism as a threat to their power and to the stability of the new nation-states. This reality immediately became a cause of concern for the regimes as they sought to legitimize their power in the new republics. With the growing threat of Islamic fundamentalism and with many ethnic groups having ties to the Middle East, the Central Asian governments continued to seek aid from the Middle East while mitigating the influence of Middle Eastern powers in the internal affairs of their states. To gain favor with the West that also feared the growth of fundamentalism, the Central Asian governments adapted harsh measures against the Islamic opposition. With little experience in independent government away from the sphere of the Soviet Union, and with ineffective police and security apparatuses, the regimes increasingly became authoritarian to consolidate their power and retain what legitimacy they possessed.

B. ETHNIC REALITY

The regimes had to confront the problem that major concentrations of ethnic minorities resided within countries other than their titular nations. One million Uzbeks live in the Khojent province of Tajikistan, half a million in the Osh area of the Fergana Valley in Kyrgyzstan, and 280,000 in the Chimkent region of Kazakhstan. One to two million Tajiks live in Samarkand and Bukhara, Uzbekistan, and nearly a million Kazaks

reside there. There are roughly eight million Russians, Ukrainian, and Germans living in the northern part of Kazakhstan. Kurdish communities with links to the Middle East are scattered throughout Central Asia, and Turkmenistan has a large ethnic Iranian population. In each of the republics, “The percentage of the titular nationality (and the ruling elite)...may be less than half [with] ethnic populations split by international boundaries.”¹

The situation did not allow for the growth of any form of ethnic nationalism. This reality, along with the perceived threat of Islamic fundamentalism, retarded the process of nation building for the new republics. Unlike many former colonies of foreign powers, Central Asia did not experience any national liberation struggles that welded the goals of the elite and the masses together. No sense of loyalty to the nation was ever created. While Russia experienced the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the people of Central Asia were barely touched by the political events that would shape their future.²

Central Asian republics did not go through any of the natural pangs of state building and thus their identity is at best confused. Under communism, the people were largely alienated from the political structure and decision-making. After independence this alienation only increased as many regimes bunkered down to survive and paid little heed to democratizing society, devolving power to the regions, or involving the people in the political process.³

Under the Soviet Union, the five Central Asian states had the political assets of territoriality and sovereign structure constructed around a core nationality that represented a majority of the population. Within the system, “the concept of republic [was] rooted in the recognition of ethnicity as the basis of nationality.”⁴ However, after the breakup of the Soviet Union, “the assumption that ethnicity would automatically translate into national identity with the eponymous republics being transformed into states [was] challenged.”⁵

¹Diane L. Smith. Central Asia: a new Great Game? <http://www.milnet.com/milnet/pentagon/centasia>. 17 June 1996.

² Ahmed Rashid. The Resurgence of Central Asia: Islam or Nationalism? (1994) Oxford University Press: 240

³ Ibid

⁴ Eden Naby. “The Emerging Central Asia: Ethnic and Religious Factions.” Central Asia and the Caucasus after the Soviet Union (1994): University of Florida: 39

⁵ Ibid, p.51

The breakup of the Soviet empire has spawned minorities within minorities. Any nationalist revival will have to ensure a program watered down enough so that it includes distant cousins from different tribes; otherwise the nationalists will be unable to gain support from all strata of society...The region has already witnessed many ethnic bloodbaths; these should act as warning signals for the future if the majority should become too demanding.⁶

The problem of ethnicity not being able to translate to nationality became a source of instability for the regimes. Lacking national identities that were stronger than ethnic bonds, the regimes had no legitimate control over large ethnic minorities from the other Central Asian states that were present inside their states. Without effective security apparatuses, the regimes were unable to enforce national identity to the populace within the borders of the individual republics. This instability was further exacerbated by the growth of Islamic fundamentalism within the new republics.

D. THE ISLAMIC REVIVAL

For Central Asia, the Islamic revival began in 1989 when Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev's *perestroika* loosened communist control and allowed religious revival to take place. "It was a cultural, social and religious phenomenon, as people wanted to demonstrate their separateness from the communist system and Slavic culture."⁷ Before Soviet rule, Islam had been a large part of the culture of Central Asia. Central Asia had been the home of vast Islamic empires that once ruled Russia. Under the Soviet Union, Islam was suppressed or, at best, controlled by the state. Despite this suppression, Islam continued to thrive in an underground world. For the peoples of Central Asia, Islam remained not only as a religion but also a part of the defining circle of their cultural world.

While an educated Uzbek or Kazak might fail to observe many of the formal rituals such as prayer...he knew that Islam gave him a distinct identity and made him what he was...Islam became one of the defining factors of ethnicity. It helped to consolidate the clan and the tribe as well as to create the much broader nationality. Islam reinforced ethnic solidarity and drove a wedge between the Russians and the non-Russian Muslims.⁸

⁶ Rashid, p.241

⁷ Ibid, p.244

⁸ Ibid, p.42

The suppression of Islam under the Soviet regime was designed to create an identity based on the Soviet man. This suppression had the opposite effect, as Islam “prospered as a cultural phenomenon that linked people together.”⁹

After independence, a cultural and historical memory of Islam emerged into the open, “yet popular knowledge of the religion of Islam was minimal and information on political activism, ideas and debates in the Islamic world beyond Central Asia was almost nonexistent.”¹⁰ The bureaucratic structure of Islam supported by the state was unable to meet the demand to fund and to support the growing Islamic movement, and the people turned elsewhere for guidance and support.

The vacuum created by the lack of leadership from the state sponsored bureaucracies allowed fundamentalist groups to proliferate. Unofficial Islamic schools spread as the Central Asian governments refused to allow Islamic education in the state-run schools. Involvement of foreign powers increased as Korans, Islamic literature, and mullahs from Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Pakistan arrived to spread particular versions of Islam. Various Middle Eastern groups began funding the movement as they took advantage of the opportunity to spread Islam in the republics. One example is the Kuwait-based “Committee for Muslims in Asia” which sent missions to the Central Asian capitals to assess the viability of projects. The committee offered financial help to numerous educational institutes and offered to sponsor students for higher education in the Arab states.¹¹ The Muslim Brotherhood now also openly supported the Islamic Renaissance Party (IRP) which was legalized in 1990 in Russia, though it still remained banned in Central Asia. Taking advantage of this sponsorship, “The IRP and other Islamic groups had no compunction in declaring their intentions to create an Islamic system in each republic which, they said, would lead to greater Central Asian unity. They considered both the ruling elite and the secular nationalists to be equal threats to this task.”¹²

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ Ibid, p.244

¹¹Anthony Hyman. “Central Hyman Asia and the Middle East: The Emerging Links.” Central Asia and the Caucasus after the Soviet Union (1994): University of Florida Press: 252

¹² Rashid, p.244-245

People bypassed official Islam by building their own mosques, sometimes with money collected from the community.

By October 1990 there were a total of 50 new mosques in Kyrgyzstan compared to 15 in 1989, 30 in Turkmenistan compared to 5 before, 40 in Tajikistan compared to 17 before. In Tashkent city, there were 30 new mosques compared to just 2 in 1989. A year later, by October 1991, there were over 1,000 new mosques in every republic.¹³

For the conservative rulers of Central Asia, the challenge of Islam against their goal to create a national identity and the presence of Islamists in the opposition became a major problem. In reaction, the ruling elites refused to comprehend the evolution of Islam within the region and refused to accommodate it as part of their political agendas.¹⁴ Their attitudes towards Islam were, to a large part, shaped by the ongoing civil war in Tajikistan that matched radical Islamic fundamentalists against the secular government.

E. THE TAJIKISTAN CIVIL WAR, ISLAMIC FUNDAMENTALISM, AND IRANIAN INFLUENCE

The civil war in Tajikistan showed the radicalization of the Islamic fundamentalist movement and fueled the fears of the Central Asian regimes. The war claimed close to 50,000 casualties and created large numbers of refugees that sought safety in neighboring Central Asian states.¹⁵ The IRP, acting contrary to its declarations that it favored democratization, multiparty political systems, human rights, and individual freedom, opted for violent methods to solve political problems. Throughout 1992, the party tried to gain military superiority over the ruling secular regime, strengthen its political position, place under its own command the republic's repressive institutions, influence the placement of officials in the upper echelons of power, and consolidate itself in the structures of local power.¹⁶ This would have repercussions throughout Central Asia as each of the regimes, fearing Islamic movements within their own republics, tightened their suppression and control over the opposition.

¹³ Ibid, p.45

¹⁴ Ibid, p.244

¹⁵ Ibid

¹⁶ Aziz Niyazi. "Tajikistan" Central Asia and the Caucasus after the Soviet Union (1994): University of Florida Press: 182-183

The civil war also gave outside powers, especially Iran, the opportunity to establish influence in Central Asia. “By the end of 1992 Iran was backing a wide range of political parties with money, food and military supplies while Afghan Mujheddin groups and Pakistan’s Jamaat-e-Islami were also active in training and supplying Islamic fundamentalists in [the Tajikistan capital of] Dushanbe.”¹⁷ At Dushanbe’s central mosque, teachers at the new madrasah claimed that the building was built with Iranian funds, that their salaries were paid by Teheran, and that an Islamic militia of 8,000 men was created and funded with Iranian aid. Foreign diplomats also claimed that the IRP was receiving airdrops of weapons from Iranian aircraft. Iranian clout, however, was greatly reduced after the Muslim coalition government, which had managed to gain power in September 1992, was ousted by secular forces.¹⁸

The damage the Tajik civil war brought against the Islamic revival was considerable. Although Iran was vilified by all of the Central Asian states for its involvement in the Tajik civil war, it was not enough to assuage the fears of the regimes. The Central Asian governments renewed their efforts to suppress the internal Islamic movements within their republics.

F. REGIME REACTION TO THE TAJIK CIVIL WAR

The Central Asian governments responded to the growing Islamic movement and the Tajik civil war by arresting members of the Islamic opposition, imprisonment, and forced exiles.¹⁹ The repression did not end there as each government undertook actions to mitigate the power of the Islamists.

In Kazakhstan, President Nursultan Nazarbaev removed Kazakhstan from the jurisdiction of the official Central Asian Spiritual Directorate of Muslims (SADUM), and established a separate Kazakhstan “muftiate.” The evidence that this new office was conducive to the goals of the state was demonstrated when the head cleric Ratbek

¹⁷ Rashid, p.180

¹⁸ Ibid, p.180-181

¹⁹Diane L. Smith. Central Asia: a new Great Game? <http://www.milnet.com/milnet/pentagon/centasia>. 17 June 1996.

Nysanbaev spoke out against the formation of an Islamic party in Kazakhstan, claiming that the existence of such a party would be a “breach of the peace.”²⁰

In Uzbekistan, the government responded to the events in Tajikistan by adopting in Article 12 of the first Constitution of the Republic of Uzbekistan the clause that “no ideology can be considered as state ideology.”²¹ Striving to create a secular social system, Article 31 of the constitution stated that “Everybody has the right to confess any religion or not to confess at all. It is inadmissible to propagate religious views in a compulsory way.”²²

In Kyrgyzstan, the appearance of armed Islamic groups escaping the Tajik civil war over the shared border between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan became a source of conflict between the two republics. The government was forced to suppress the Islamic movement after the head of the Islamic Center in Kyrgyzstan, Sakykjanhadji Kamalov, revealed his sympathy for the Islamic fighters. The regime began a campaign to marginalize the power of the Islamists within the republic.²³

In Turkmenistan, President Saparmurad Niyazov steered Turkmenistan’s foreign policy away from Iranian influence. President Niyazov’s first state visit was not to fundamentalist Iran, but to secular oriented Turkey. During his visit to Ankara, President Niyazov asked Turkish leaders to send professors of Islam to Turkmenistan “in order to prevent radical Iranian Islam from filling the existing vacuum.”²⁴

In Tajikistan, after the secular neo-communist won power back from the radical Islamists, the government actively sought to contain the spread of Islamic fundamentalist ideology. Russia and Kazakhstan sought to contain Iranian influence within Tajikistan by threatening to lessen their arms trade with the Middle Eastern state.²⁵ The civil war also

²⁰ Martha Brill Olcott. “Kazakhstan.” Central Asia and the Caucasus after the Soviet Union (1994): University of Florida Press: 130

²¹ Zahid I. Munavvarov. “Uzbekistan” Central Asia and the Caucasus after the Soviet Union (1994): University of Florida Press: 144

²² Ibid

²³ Alexander O. Filonyk. “Kyrgyzstan.” Central Asia and the Caucasus after the Soviet Union (1994): University of Florida Press: 160

²⁴ Andrei G. Nedvetsky. “Turkmenistan” Central Asia and the Caucasus after the Soviet Union (1994): University of Florida Press: 200

²⁵ Niyazi, p.185

opened Tajikistan to influence from its neighboring Central Asian states. Peacekeeping forces from Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyzstan were allowed into Tajikistan to suppress the opposition, and the civil war justified the stationing of 25,000 Russian troops in the republic to protect the peace and patrol Tajikistan's common border with Afghanistan²⁶ – from where the Islamic rebels forayed into Tajikistan or escaped pursuing neo-communist forces.

In the first few years after the civil war began, the governments of Central Asia opted for repression and refused to accommodate the Islamic parties within the mainstream of the parliamentary opposition. Banning orders, jail sentences, and decrees against the opposition became common. Although this brought about partial stability, democracy suffered because of the regimes' unwillingness to open the political system to varied opposition. "The result has been that political parties barely exist and their future growth has been stunted."²⁷

G. INTERNATIONAL REACTION TO GROWING ISLAMIC FUNDAMENTALISM

"Like the governments of Central Asia, the West, particularly the USA, also became unnecessarily hostile [to the growth of Islamic fundamentalism.]"²⁸ During the Cold War, the Western powers had used Islam as a means to undermine communist influence in Central Asia. In 1979, the US used the Afghan war to spread Islam in Central Asia and undermine communism. The CIA funded the Mujheddin to smuggle in Korans, tape recordings, money, and weapons to Islamic groups in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.²⁹

After 1991, the West changed tack. US Secretary of State James Baker publicly warned the Central Asian leaders to stay clear of radical Islam and the influence of Iran. He urged them to emulate Turkey's secular model, tying Western aid packages to adherence to US wishes. This encouraged the regimes to increase their rhetoric against

²⁶Diane L. Smith. Central Asia: a new Great Game? <http://www.milnet.com/milnet/pentagon/centasia>. 17 June 1996.

²⁷ Rashid, p.46

²⁸ Ibid, p.245

²⁹ Ibid

the Islamic movement. The Central Asian governments hoped to gain audience in Western capitals and acquire foreign aid by heeding the warning of Secretary Baker.³⁰

The spread of Islamic fundamentalism in Central Asia became a popular threat to the new world order in Western media after the Tajik civil war.³¹ This was also true in the Russian media, as Islamic fundamentalism was increasingly portrayed as a threat that was spreading in Central Asia and Caucasia.³²

For the West in the early years immediately following the independence of the Central Asian states, the need for security and stability within Central Asia overrode the need for democracy. Islamic fundamentalism, especially after the Tajik civil war, was perceived as a threat to stability and security in the region. With stability as the overarching goal, the West conveniently ignored the repressive measures the Central Asian regimes took to secure their republics against the fundamentalist threat.

H. THE ROLE ISLAM PLAYS IN THE REBIRTH OF CENTRAL ASIAN IDENTITY AND CULTURE

Although the Tajikistan civil war did show the dangers of radical Islamic fundamentalism when it became politicized, there are other explanations for why the civil war began. “Initially portrayed as the result of radical Islamic fundamentalism, the civil war is, in reality, less about religion or ideology and more about the economic, linguistic, ethnic, clan, and regional rivalries for access to political and economic spoils.”³³

Tajik Islamists were driven as much by clan rivalries, the growth of localism and economic deprivation as by their desire to set up an Islamic state. Local people saw the IRP in Tajikistan as a political party first, representing the group interests of particular regions and clans, and an Islamic party second. The fact that the IRP was allied to secular nationalist and democratic parties against the neo-communist forces appears to prove this.³⁴

³⁰ Ibid, p.46

³¹ Ibid, p.245

³² Arthur Sagadeev. “Great Power Ideology and the Muslim Nations of the CIS” Central Asia and the Caucasus after the Soviet Union (1994): University of Florida Press: 241

³³Diane L. Smith. Central Asia: a new Great Game? <http://www.milnet.com/milnet/pentagon/centasia>. 17 June 1996.

³⁴ Rashid, p.246

Although political Islam could be seen as a potential source of instability by the regimes in Central Asia, especially when supported by a fundamentalist foreign power, the actual threat Islamic fundamentalism poses is arguable.

Central Asian leaders have exaggerated the incursion of radical Islamic fundamentalism and pushed it forward as the new “threat” to justify their suppression of internal dissent. They overstate Central Asian adherence to the religious elements of Islam and the potential of Islamic states to export their revolution...True, there has been an explosion of mosque building and Koran distribution (funded externally, especially by the Saudis), but at this stage much of the interest has been in “folk Islam”...and in rediscovering a lost cultural identity, rather than a purely religious conviction.³⁵

When Secretary Baker visited Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan in February 1992, “He discovered that there were no Irans in the making there. Rather than spreading an anti-Western fundamentalist revolution, these three republics were ‘interested primarily in developing their backward economies’.”³⁶

The main mistake of many observers to the events transpiring in Central Asia is that the Islamic movement is homogeneous. “Such generalized conclusions are inaccurate. They are even dangerous and may generate misperceptions both about the present-day reality and the prospects of social, political, and economic development [of Central Asia.]”³⁷

The development of Islam as a radical fundamentalist monolithic force in Central Asia faces many obstacles. The diversity of ethnicity in each of the republics creates an obstacle in that ethnic minorities will not join movements led by ethnic majorities and vice versa, making it difficult for the Islamists to build the movement across ethnic lines. Central Asia possesses a preponderance of ethnic divisions and rivalries that will militate against the unitary form of fundamentalism. The individual Central Asian states are also more or less influenced by Slavic and Western cultures that affect how the religious movement will evolve in each of the independent states. Finally, the examples of

³⁵Diane L. Smith. Central Asia: a new Great Game? <http://www.milnet.com/milnet/pentagon/centasia>. 17 June 1996.

³⁶ Sagadeev, p.242

³⁷ Munavvarov, p.141

Tajikistan and Afghanistan under Islamic regimes remain as important factors in dissuading people from joining radical movements.³⁸

The development of Islam as part of the culture and identity of Central Asia, however, continues to grow.

Islam for the Central Asian region is not a new phenomenon but a basis for the unique civilization of the peoples inhabiting the region. The attempt to eradicate Islam – along with Christianity – in Russia was an unnatural effort doomed to failure from the beginning. It should be admitted as erroneous what some scientific-analytical centers suggest – that the present day religious renaissance in the Central Asian region is exclusively the result of a sharp rise in Islamic fundamentalist activities. Here one should speak about the ways of returning to the truly national culture, in the finest sense of the word.³⁹

Part of the cultural revival in Central Asia is the revival of Sufism, the mystical trend of Islam that originated in Central Asia. Sufism, in its informal expression of faith, has gripped the people's imagination and has provided spiritual sustenance at a time of enormous political and economic turmoil. Within their practice, "the Sufis are playing a prominent role in reviving the ancient skills of martial arts, healing through herbal medicine, education, publishing ancient poetry and literature, meditation, and yoga."⁴⁰ The fundamentalists, in contrast, have little to offer in terms of promoting old cultural skills, but instead promote a Puritanism that is alien to Central Asia. "People may be initially lured by the fundamentalists because of their vast funds and their message of revolution, but the beauty of Islam in Central Asia is that it is rooted in culture and philosophy and above all tolerance."⁴¹

I. CONCLUSION

Serious political, economic, ethnic, and religious challenges confronted the Central Asian states as they emerged from the shadow of 70 years of Soviet rule. With independence, the Central Asian governments sought to build political, economic, and civic institutions that would provide them with the stability and security they needed to continue the process of nation building. Any sources of instability, however, would

³⁸ Rashid, p.246

³⁹ Munavvarov, p.143

⁴⁰ Rashid, p.247

⁴¹ Ibid

threaten that security and stability. The ethnic reality on the ground and the growth of Islamic fundamentalism in the region immediately became sources of instability for the regimes as they prevented the consolidation of power and the creation of legitimacy the governments desperately sought.

The presence of large ethnic minorities, many with ties to the Middle East, within each of the individual republics coupled with the rapid growth of Islamic fundamentalism threatened what little control the governments had within their borders. The influence of foreign powers in the growth of the Islamic revival, and the Tajik civil war that involved Islamic militants contributed to the insecurities of the regimes.

In response, the governments reacted with arrests, imprisonments, and exiles – opting to suppress the minorities and the Islamic movements rather than include them in the political process. International reaction also condemned the growing fundamentalist movement, as Western powers feared the emergence of another Iran in Central Asia. In the early years following the independence of the region, the United States, despite its professed goal of promoting democracy, ignored the repressive measures of the Central Asian regimes, opting for stability in each of the republics rather than political diversity and participation.

However, the growing Islamic movement in Central Asia was not a monolithic force that threatened the security of the regimes or the stability of the region. Rather, it was part of the cultural revival of the peoples of the Central Asia as they found their freedom away from the suppression of Soviet rule. The regimes in power, unable or unwilling to comprehend any movement that would threaten their hold, refused to engage this phenomenon, and continue their repression of the perceived threat. With fragile political structures, stagnant economies, inefficient civic institutions, and the inability to secure a legitimate hold on power, the governments are unable to break from the cycle of intolerance and continue to exercise repressive measures to this day.

Although in the early years following independence US foreign policy was only concerned with stability in Central Asia, US foreign policy gradually evolved as financial interests in the Caspian region grew. In formulating the evolving policy, US foreign policy makers recognized the importance of Turkey and Iran to the region, and began

engaging Turkey while isolating Iran in the pursuit of US interests in the region. Turkey, as a Middle East ally with ethnic, religious, cultural and linguistic ties to Central Asia and Caucasia, became the medium for the introduction of US national interests into the region. However, the US sought to mitigate the influence of Iran while also engaging the former hegemon, Russia, in the region's new Great Game.

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III. THE ROLE OF TURKEY AND IRAN IN US FOREIGN POLICY IN CENTRAL ASIA AND CAUCASIA

A. INTRODUCTION

With the breakup of the Soviet Union and the independence of the former Soviet states in Central Asia and Caucasias, Iran and Turkey have gained significance in the region not only because of their shared borders but also because of a shared culture. The Caucasian and Central Asian states, being predominantly Muslim, have more in common to the Middle East than with the region's northern neighbor, Russia, or with its eastern neighbor, China. With a relatively stable, secular government in Turkey, the region's states have looked towards Turkey while continuing to integrate into a world no longer dominated by a Cold War mentality. The region's physical proximity to Iran has also become important, as Iran has tried to bring the region into its sphere of influence. Because of United States' interests in keeping stability within the region and because of the region's economic potential, the United States has engaged Turkey to influence the region's development to the advantage of the US. Because of Turkey's importance to the US as a Middle East ally, and because of Turkey's ethnic, religious, cultural and linguistic ties with the Caucasian and Central Asian states, the US has used and will continue to use Turkey as a medium to advance US interests in the region. Because of the Iranian revolution, the Tajik civil war, and the perceived threat of Islamic fundamentalism, the US has actively sought to mitigate the influence of Iran into the region. Future rapprochement or continued tension with Iran will determine to what extent the US will influence the region through the Persian Gulf power.

Until the US can establish a stable presence within the region, US foreign policy toward the region will depend on the US' relationship with both Iran and Turkey. The United States, also wary about its relationship with Russia, will also hope to engage Russia to influence how the former superpower will act within its sphere of influence as the one state that is most able to physically affect events within the region.

B. THE CENTRAL ASIAN AND CAUCASIAN RELATIONSHIP WITH IRAN AND TURKEY

Under the Soviet Union, links between the Middle East and the Central Asian and Caucasian states were limited and controlled from Moscow. As discussed in chapter II, with the breakup of the Soviet Union and the independence of these states in 1991, the transborder ethnic, tribal, and national connections of these states to other states in the Middle East have become important. Large ethnic communities, such as the Kurds, that are scattered in Central Asia and Caucasia, have links to the communities that live in the Middle East. In addition, migrant communities, such as the Turkomans that were expelled from the region after the Russian Revolution of 1917, live throughout the Middle East but still have ties to their former homeland.

For Iran, cultural relations with Azerbaijan are of particular importance. Azeri Turks who live in this state are ethnically and culturally close to those living in the adjoining Iranian provinces based in Tabriz and Ardebil. The Azeri Turks form Iran's largest national minority. Tajikistan has also become important for Iran for cultural reasons. Tajiks are Persian speakers who look to Iran in cultural matters even more than any other Central Asia state.⁴²

Religion, discussed in chapter II, has also gained importance. With growing religious freedom in the former USSR in the mid 1980s, an Islamic revival began in the Muslim republics after decades of communist repression and persecution. Many Middle East states sponsored religious missions to the former Soviet republics, and Shia Muslims are a majority of the population in Azerbaijan. However, the secular minded governments of these states are more likely to look elsewhere to guide them through their stages of development. The attraction to Turkey, thus, seems justified.

The ruling elites [of the region] are prepared to look anywhere and everywhere for guidance and help in solving their severe problems of development. They are by no means restricted to one country or model, let alone to societies claiming to be exemplars of Islam...indeed, the contemporary Iranian or Saudi Arabian models of society on offer seem remote, deficient, or even irrelevant to the secular-oriented members of the ruling elites of Central Asia. The basic orientation to building a better society in the republics is secular and modernist.⁴³

⁴² Hyman, p.254

⁴³ Ibid, p.251

Turkey has deliberately emphasized that their influence in the cultural, economic, and political fields is secular. Drawing from Turkey's secular based development, "Nationalist circles in Turkey take great pride in Ankara's efforts to woo the Turks of Central Asia, efforts that include satellite TV and alphabet reforms away from Cyrillic to Latin."⁴⁴ Turkey is training one thousand students in its universities in a program that takes in students in all grades from six republics. A total of ten thousand students were reportedly studying in Turkey at the beginning of 1993 in the fields of telephone communications, infrastructure, transport, and general trading.⁴⁵

Turkish business interests in the region are extremely active. However, in areas requiring large-scale investment, notably in gas and oil, Turkish companies are finding tough competition against foreign multinationals. Though Turkey itself has little hard currency available for foreign investment, its expertise in industry and manufacturing is more impressive than Iran's.⁴⁶ Many private Turkish companies are investing and trading in the region and the Turkish model of development is the common reference point. Azerbaijan's former Foreign Minister, Tofik Gasymov, reflecting the sentiment that Turkey's secular model should be the one that Azerbaijan should emulate, declared during a visit to Ankara in 1992 that "Turkey is our greatest helper. We want Turkey's aid in establishing links with the world."⁴⁷

Despite having a government set on religious cornerstones as opposed to Turkey's secular model, Iran still plays a role in the economic development of the region. Even though its economy is stagnant, Iran still has hard currency available because of its earnings from oil and gas exports. Iran's influence in Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan has been increased by its geographic position, offering an alternative to reliance for trade routes on Russia or through Transcaucasia. Iran can also help the other landlocked Central Asian and Caucasian states by providing access to Iranian ports. Iran is able to expand its railway and freight networks to allow these states to bring their trade to the Persian Gulf coast. Iran, like Turkey, is active in the oil and gas sector, with joint

⁴⁴ Ibid, p.255

⁴⁵ Ibid

⁴⁶ Ibid, p.257

⁴⁷ Ibid, p.258

developments with Azerbaijan in the Caspian Sea region. In 1992, Iran signed an agreement for bilateral trade and closer economic cooperation with Azerbaijan.

For Caucasasia and Central Asia, then, Iran and Turkey can be seen as models for political, social, and economic development. The two states serve as bridges to the outside world. Because of this, the United States has engaged Turkey while isolating Iran in an effort to influence the development of the region. Whatever actions the United States takes in the region, however, cannot ignore the role of the region's former power, Russia.

In any discussion of foreign relations concerning Central Asia and Caucasasia, Russia's complex relationship with the region, preceding from the Soviet era, must be taken into consideration. Much depends on the viability of Russia and the presence of substantial Russian minorities in all the states.

For all the Central Asian states, a major concern is that Moscow may try to regain control of the region. Russia retains enormous residual power to affect events in the former Soviet republics. This residual power is most felt in the area of security, where the virtually defenseless Central Asian states remain totally dependent on the direct or indirect Russian presence and help. Thus the new Muslim states of the former Soviet Union will remain cognizant of their delicate position between Russia and their Muslim brothers in the South...Moscow's interests and preferences will be an important consideration in shaping the attitudes of Central Asian states toward the Middle East⁴⁸

C. PAST AND PRESENT US FOREIGN POLICY

In March 1999, during a hearing of the House International Relations committee, Representative Bereuter, the chairman of the committee, summarized what he accepted to be the choices Central Asia faced. "The Central Asian states are at a critical juncture in their political and economic development, balanced between democracy and authoritarianism, between a free market economy and systematic corruption, between cooperation or resistance to the West. In short, the region is poised between merging into or retreating from the free world order."⁴⁹ Representative Bereuter listed three challenges that he believed Central Asia would face entering the 21st century: forging a

⁴⁸ Ibid, p.263

⁴⁹ "US Policy towards the Central Asia republics." Federal News Service 17 March 1999.

shared national identity from the intermingled ethnic and religious groups, institutionalizing political and legal structures that are compatible with democracy, and creating a free, open economic system. Ambassador Steven Sestanovich, speaking to the committee as the special adviser to the Secretary of State, summarized America's foreign policy in the region.

Today the overarching goal of American policy in Central Asia remains securing the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of the states of the region. To advance this objective, our diplomacy focuses on four key goals: first, the formation of democratic political institutions; second, market economic reform; third, regional cooperation; and fourth, responsible security policies.⁵⁰

Ambassador Sestanovich also addressed the influence of Russia, Iran, and Turkey in the region, pointing out the concerns on the spread of Iranian influence into the Central Asian states.

[The leaders of the Central Asian republics] fear an expansion of Iranian influence and the rise of violent extremism in their countries...We share it. There are at the same time economic relations that can draw them together, and over the long term will be healthy. Their concern is largely about the creation of an ideological lever by Iran, the support for radical groups and movements in their societies.⁵¹

However, in contrast to the view towards Iran, Ambassador Sestanovich believed that Russian, Turkish, and US policies in the region could be compatible.

We have argued that – to both countries, to both the government of Turkey and the government of Russia, that properly understood our interests can converge in this region...Russian officials are very quick to express their concerns in this area. Turkish officials and political figures have the same kinds of concerns. We can have a number of disagreements about how we advance these interests, but I think our starting point needs to be a recognition that in many respects we can have conversion interests. We want to pursue those in a way that recognizes and respects the independence, sovereignty, [and] territorial integrity of these countries. On that basis, if other countries have the same respect we can work together. If they don't, we can't.⁵²

To support US foreign policy in the region, Ambassador Sestanovich pointed out that the United States had assisted Turkey in developing energy transportation pipelines in the Caspian region, had given the Central Asian states financial support under the

⁵⁰ Ibid

⁵¹ Ibid

⁵² Ibid

auspices of the Freedom Support Act, had increased American presence in the region through the establishment of American embassies, and had developed security within the region under the NATO exercise Partnership for Peace.

Despite the high expectations for Central Asia generated in the March 1999 hearing, another hearing by the same committee held in June 2001, did not reflect the same optimism. Representative Rohrabacher expressed his frustration in what he believed to be the extent of US foreign policy in Central Asia. “There’s been very little done in Central Asia by the United States government. And, because of that, [despite] these last 10 years what was a tremendous opportunity for expanding the democratic system into the region...I’m afraid that, by all of the criteria in judging how far we’ve come, we have not made very much progress.”⁵³

In examining the results of US foreign policy in the region, the committee established that the US had not significantly altered the political development of the region to foster democracy and compatibility with the West. Acting Principal Deputy to the Office of the Special Advisor to the Secretary of State for the New Independent States Clifford Bond addressed the concerns of the committee.

Only by empowering their citizens through democratization and economic reform can these governments ensure lasting popular support and stability. This is an integral part of our message to the governments of Central Asia. Unfortunately...that progress on reform has been slow and at best uneven. At one extreme...we have the government of Turkmenistan which remains one of the most repressive regimes in the world with a stalwartness era of command economy and a cultic personality that rivals North Korea’s. Uzbekistan has rejected serious economic reform, and is carrying out repression among the independent Muslims that could exacerbate its own security concerns. Kazakhstan through its oil wells has achieved macroeconomic stability, but even as its government has publicly touted democratic principles, it has progressively sought to silence political opponents, the independent media and NGOs.⁵⁴

However, in addressing the committee’s concerns on Iranian influence in the region, Deputy Bond reflected the views held by Ambassador Sestanovich two years earlier. “Iran’s export of Islamic fundamentalism has been very unwelcomed in Central Asia. The Iranians have been active there, and we’re concerned about that...Central Asia

⁵³ “US Policy in Central Asia.” Federal News Service 6 June 2001.

⁵⁴ Ibid

is not fertile ground for Islamic fundamentalism. The Islamic tradition in these countries is a very tolerant one.”⁵⁵ Despite this assessment of Iranian Islamic fundamentalism’s influence in the region, Deputy Bond did see how Islamic fundamentalism could be used as a political force against the repressive governments. “We do not see Islamic fundamentalism right now as a threat to the states of Central Asia, but that the policies that are being pursued by the governments now are driving the young, particularly because there’s a lack of economic opportunity, into the arms of the extremists.”⁵⁶

Regardless of the optimism for Central Asia generated in the March 1999 hearing during the Clinton administration, the House International Relations Committee did not share the same outlook two years later. Although the goals of American foreign policy remained the same, the committee echoed frustration about the region and its lack of political reform. The region also had not demonstrated the ability to cooperate as one entity or hold responsible security policies.

However, for the committee members and audience in both hearings, the spread of Iranian influence and Islamic fundamentalism seemed to be checked, and the development of parts of the region through economic ties was slowly progressing in a desired direction. One economic policy that appeared to be serving US goals within the area was the development of energy pipelines with Turkey in the Caspian region.

D. DEVELOPMENT OF THE CASPIAN REGION

An agreement in November 1999 for the opening of energy pipelines from the Caspian region to the Mediterranean through Turkey between the governments of Turkey, Georgia, and Azerbaijan was hailed by the Clinton administration as a foreign policy triumph. Former Energy Secretary Bill Richardson, reflecting the administration’s enthusiasm, said, “This is not just another oil and gas deal, and this is not just another pipeline. It is a strategic framework that advances America’s national security interests. It is a strategic vision for the future of the Caspian region.”⁵⁷ The Caspian basin is believed to hold between 15 billion to 30 billion barrels of reserves, and the Clinton

⁵⁵ Ibid

⁵⁶ Ibid

⁵⁷ Tom Hundley, Tom. “Caspian Sea Oil a Prize the US wants to control.” Chicago Tribune 25 November 1999.

administration's aim was "to secure US access to the Caspian basin and to extend American commercial and political interests into the Caucasus and Central Asia."⁵⁸

The Clinton administration's unstated goal also appears to have been to keep Russian and Iranian influence out of the region. Robert Ebel, an energy specialist at the Center for Strategic Studies in Washington, summed up the administration's aim in influencing the decision for the pipeline route, "Anywhere but Iran."⁵⁹ Although an Iranian pipeline offers the cheapest alternative, US sanctions against Iran make the pipeline impossible to build.⁶⁰ Opposing the Russians, the Clinton administration faced a different challenge.

Having lost possession of the natural riches of its former republics, powerful Russians sought to continue to control them...Moscow's main lever of power, then as now, was its pipeline system, a remnant of the centralized Soviet economy in which all oil and natural gas from the Caspian first traversed Russia before passing on to the West.⁶¹

Against the agreement signed by Turkey, Georgia, and Azerbaijan in November 1999, Moscow continued to advocate enlargement of an existing northern pipeline to Russia's Black Sea port of Novorossisk. However, Russia would face opposition from the Clinton administration. "American assertiveness has been to shrink Russia's backyard so that when Russia gets back on its feet, it cannot march back into the Caucasus and Central Asia."⁶²

The Baku-Ceyhan Pipeline that the three states agreed to build would completely bypass any region that Russia could influence. It would begin at Azerbaijan's capital, Baku, cross over Georgia and Turkey, and end at the Turkish Mediterranean port of Ceyhan. In addition to the oil from Azerbaijan, American negotiators have also been pressing Kazakhstan to send its oil and gas to Baku through an undersea link where it will be transported through the Baku-Ceyhan Pipeline. The projected completion of the

⁵⁸ Ibid

⁵⁹ Ibid

⁶⁰ Stephen Kinzer. "Summit in Turkey: The Caspian Accord; Caspian Lands back a Pipeline pushed by the West." The New York Times. 19 November 1999.

⁶¹ Steve Levine. "A Cocktail of Oil and Politics; US seeks to end Russian domination of the Caspian." The New York Times. 20 November 1999.

⁶² Ibid

project is in 2004. The opening of a pipeline in April 1999 that linked Baku to Georgian Black Sea port of Supsa had already taken revenue away from Russia.⁶³ With the completion of Baku-Ceyhan, Russian oil revenues from the area would be severely hampered, together with Russian influence.

Although agreement has been reached to begin the project, financing for the project has not been finalized. The Turkish government, recognizing the importance of the project for Turkey, assumed the liability for the project should it exceed the projected \$1.4 billion. However, Turkey currently faces a grave financial crisis, in which the United States, in furthering its own national interests, is willing to help.

E. TURKEY AND PIPELINE POLITICS

Apart from satiating Turkey's need for energy, the development of new pipelines to transport oil and gas to western markets through its territory would enhance Turkey's regional power. Any enhancement of Turkey's influence within the region would benefit the United States by furthering US national interests. However, given Turkey's economic problems, The United States, as Turkey's strongest ally, needed to exert pressure with the oil companies to finance the Baku-Ceyhan Pipeline.

Among western oil companies, some of which feel they were brow beaten with the help of US pressure into backing Baku-Ceyhan, doubts still persist, however, about the project's commercial viability. US government pressure is again likely to be brought to bear, this time in encouraging banks to finance the proposed pipelines. "These projects are an extension of US foreign policy," argues one European banker. "This is why you will see US banks involved."⁶⁴

Given the importance of the pipeline in enhancing US influence within Caucasia and Central Asia, the United States was willing to exert pressure on any economic institution to further its national interests, including exerting pressure on the International Monetary Fund to assist Turkey in its current financial crisis. In March 2001, the IMF enlarged the credit line available to Turkey from \$3.8 billion to \$11.4 billion.⁶⁵

⁶³ Stephen Kinzer. "Caucasus and Central Asia look to Pipeline opening Saturday to cut reliance on Russia." The New York Times. 13 April 1999.

⁶⁴ Leyla Boulton. "Survey – Turkey Infrastructure: Pipeline diplomacy to enhance regional power: Oil and Gas: Turkey's ambitious projects have received critical support from the US for geopolitical reasons." Financial Times (London). 5 April 2000.

⁶⁵ Stephen Fidler. "Dilemma for US over Turkish bailout." Financial Times (London). 2 March 2001.

Turkey is viewed in Washington as one of the developing countries most vital to American interests. From this traditional national security standpoint, Turkey is viewed as a linchpin for US strategic interests...It forms the eastern flank of NATO, and has been seen as presenting a counterweight to its neighbor Russia in the unstable regions to its east – and, as such, the center of the east-west US energy policy in the oil and gas rich Caspian region.⁶⁶

For the United States and for the new Bush administration, Turkey's importance in the geopolitics of the region are too important to allow Turkey to stagnate in economic crisis.⁶⁷ However, US foreign policy towards Iran, when compared to Turkey, in regards to Central Asia and Caucasia is much more complex situation when taking into account the opposition to the continued sanctions against Iran and the re-election of Iran's reformist president Mohammed Khatami.

F. IRANIAN GOALS AND US SANCTIONS

In an article in the Iranian newspaper *Resalat*, Gholamreza Mohammadi, an Iranian international affairs analyst, contented that outside powers such as the United States and the European Union have actively pursued the prevention of ties between Iran and Central Asia. Outlining the activities the United States had taken to undermine Iranian influence within the region, Mohammadi listed several actions: the US' use of sanctions; its threats and promises to sovereign states to keep Iran isolated; its efforts to prevent oil pipelines from the region to cross Iran to the world market; its economic support and development of Turkey's oil infrastructure; and its backing of Turkey's and Israel's political and economic activities within the region. Contending that Iran was far behind Turkey and the US in influencing the region, Mohammadi recommended that Iranian policy makers concentrate on decreasing the negative publicity of Iran concerning the dissemination of Islamic thought, and on the need to bolster Iranian economic activity within the region by strengthening the diplomatic missions there.⁶⁸

Even if Iran is successful in improving its Islamic image and in establishing stronger economic ties with Caucasia and the Central Asian states, continued US sanctions against Iran will not allow the state to generate the substantial revenue needed

⁶⁶ Ibid

⁶⁷ Gerard Baker and Stephen Fidler. "A Few False Steps." *Financial Times (London)*. 9 May 2001.

⁶⁸ Gholamreza Mohammadi. "Iran's relations with Central Asia and the Caucasus: a look at existing obstacles." *Resalat* 15 March 2001.

to influence the region away from its secular, pro-western stance. For Iran's foreign policy to succeed within the region, Iran must also overcome the general skepticism and suspicion of Iranian goals that the region's elite hold. US sanctions against Iran have hurt the state as evidenced by Iran's official complaint to the United Nations General Assembly claiming that "[US sanctions] have 'led to the disruption of Iran's economy...a decline in the growth of the country's gross national product...[and] a scarcity of essential goods needed for the improvement of the nutritional and health care standards of the Iranian people.'"⁶⁹ Like Turkey, Iran also faces its own financial problems. Unlike Turkey, however, Iran does not enjoy the support of the United States to allow it to pursue its foreign policy agenda. Instead, the US actively pursues the isolation of Iran. This isolation, however, is not without an opposition.

In a letter to President Clinton signed by 15 senators and 17 members of Congress in January 1999, Senator Larry Craig urged the President to issue a special license to allow a US company to sell \$500 million worth of American grain to Iran. In the letter, Senator Craig forwarded the argument that the transaction "may result in several positive effects, including...demonstrating to the Iranian government an example of positive results which stem from acceptable standards of international behavior."⁷⁰ This letter was not the first sign of the faltering strength of the sanctions imposed against Iran, nor would it be the last.

In November 1997, the Clinton administration had felt pressure from Congress to impose sanctions against CFP-Total of France and Russia's Gazprom for their \$2 billion gas investment deal with Iran, a transaction that could have significance to Iran's influence in Central Asia and Caucasia. However, the administration also felt pressure from Russia not to impose sanctions against its company. After the United Nations formally dropped sanctions against Libya in April 1999 following Libya's release of the two primary suspects of the 1988 Lockerbie bombing, pressure mounted on the Clinton administration to end the continued isolation of Iran through the Iran-Libya Sanctions Act. Finally, in May 1999, Mobil Oil forwarded the argument that continued sanctions against Iran served to hurt US companies in the long term. "US-Iran rapprochement

⁶⁹ "Senators support Wheat Sales." Arab News. 11 January 1999.

⁷⁰ Ibid

would go a long way to bolster regional harmony...We believe sanctions harm innocent civilians, not the perpetrators, cost American companies sales and jobs, and can frustrate our allies. Maintaining sanctions on Iran while foreign companies can invest there with no restrictions not only puts American companies on the sidelines but, more importantly, weakens America's foreign policy in the region."⁷¹ The sanctions effectively did not allow US companies to invest in any lucrative transactions, allowing other countries to gain influence in Iran. This included the development of Iran's transportation infrastructure into Central Asia, which could develop without American influence, effectively mitigating US geopolitical goals in the region.

After the Clinton administration, the Bush administration researched the viability of continued sanctions against Iran. An energy task force, headed by Vice President Dick Cheney broached the possibility of lifting sanctions in an effort to increase the US oil supply. Although the 10 April 2001 draft acknowledged the importance of sanctions in advancing national security and diplomatic goals, it also added that the UN sanctions on Iraq and US restrictions on energy investment on Libya and Iran "affect[ed] some of the most important existing and prospective petroleum producing countries in the world,"⁷² including the landlocked Central Asian states. Though he did not rule out lifting sanctions, President Bush said that he had no immediate plans to do so.⁷³ The task force's draft recommendations came during a debate in Congress over the practicality of renewing the Iran-Libya Sanctions Act for five more years after it expires in August 2001. Supporting the lifting of the act are many US oil companies that want to develop Central Asia through Iran.

G. PRESIDENT MOHAMMED KHATAMI, PRESIDENT GEORGE W. BUSH AND POSSIBLE RAPPROCHEMENT

With the decisive re-election of Iran reformist President Mohammed Khatami, the prospects of better relations between the US and Iran and the lifting of sanctions seem closer. However, the popular Iranian President "must address [the] demands for greater democracy, integration with the outside world and a rethinking of the country's religious

⁷¹ "Mobil plays its card." The Iran Brief. 3 May 1999

⁷² Peter Behr and Alan Sipress. "Cheney-led Panel seeks a review of sanctions; Iran, Iraq and Libya considered as oil sources." International Herald Tribune. 20 April 2001.

⁷³ Ibid

form of government,”⁷⁴ domestically and abroad. He must also contend with Iran’s supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khameni, whose conservative outlook may derail whatever international or domestic reforms President Khatami might propose.

At stake is the peaceful evolution of a country that is a powerful influence in one of the world’s most volatile regions and – despite not having any formal ties with the United States over the last two decades – remains a potent factor in US foreign policy on critical issues, including the Middle East Peace process, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, terrorism, and global oil and gas supplies.⁷⁵

In the United States, President Bush is also faced with pressure to review the United States’ foreign policy toward Iran. With the pressure to lift sanctions coming from international and domestic sources, the new administration is faced with the choice to engage Iran rather than isolate the country as the US has done for the last two decades.

The Islamic Republic is of enormous strategic importance to the United States and its friends and allies. Sixty-five percent of the world’s known oil reserves lie below and around the Gulf. Iran has the second largest national gas reserves in the world. The Caspian Sea’s potential oil and gas reserves are estimated at \$4 trillion. Ultimately, no policy for Caspian energy can ignore Iran...The United States should continue to try to prevent the import of weapons of mass destruction into Iran, but it should lift other sanctions that not only block American corporations from trading with Iran but also allow penalties against foreign companies that invest in its oil industry.⁷⁶

H. RUSSIAN INFLUENCE AND THE PROLIFERATION OF WEAPONS

Raymond Garthoff, a retired senior fellow at the Brookings Institute and a former ambassador to Bulgaria, summarized in an editorial to the *Los Angeles Times* Russian President Vladimir Putin’s foreign policy to the West, including the United States.

What can we expect from Putin’s foreign policy? He will, as he should, pursue Russian national interests. Yet, he will not, by choice, pursue an anti-Western policy, nor will he seek to establish hegemony over former Soviet republics.

⁷⁴ Molly Moore. “Khatami’s New Term will test his resolve.” International Herald Tribune. 11 June 2001.

⁷⁵ Ibid

⁷⁶ Stanley A. Weiss. “Iran matters too much to be left out of America’s Relations.” International Herald Tribune. 25 April 2001.

There will, however, be some friction when Russian national interests conflict with other countries', including the US.⁷⁷

Ambassador Garthoff, despite this outlook, also signified Russia's concerns over American actions in the Caspian region.

One significant area of growing US-Russian friction arises from the US role in the exploitation and transportation of the oil and gas in the Caspian Basin... Vigorous US diplomatic maneuvering, often with an ill-concealed anti-Russian element, has provoked Moscow's concern and resentment. This is heightened when accompanied by such things as a US military presence through the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's Partnership for Peace training programs. Putin will seek to protect Russian interests in the region, preferably cooperatively with the US, but, if necessary, competitively.⁷⁸

One area that is a definite concern for Washington is the growing relationship between Russia and Iran and Russia's willingness to export to Iran weapons that could be used to further Iran's influence in the Central Asian and Caucasian region. The visit of Marshall Igor Sergeyev, Russia's defense minister, to Iran in December 2000, was hailed the Iranian newspaper *Javan* as a new chapter in relations between the two countries. During the visit, both countries agreed to cooperate in the areas of defense to promote peace and security while standing together against any regional challenges. Both countries unilaterally rejected the Gore-Chernomydrin Convention established in 1995 which prohibited Russia from selling weapons to Iran or giving the country military, scientific, and technical information. The convention, drawn up by former Vice President Al Gore, was one device the US had employed to continue the isolation of Iran.

For *Javan*, the initiation of informational, strategic, and defense cooperation between Russia and Iran was a "symbol of exterminating the interfering policies of non-regional countries in the domestic affairs of and relations between regional countries."⁷⁹ In summarizing Russia's goals for the new cooperation between the two states, *Javan* asserted that Russia understood that Iran was an appropriate market for the export of military weapons, including missiles, from the impoverished Russian military industrial establishment; that Iran could supply the financial needs of Russia in exchange for

⁷⁷ Raymond Garthoff. "Russian Election; Putin's unformed policies promise measured change." Los Angeles Times. 2 April 2000.

⁷⁸ Ibid

⁷⁹ "Iran: Paper views Russian motives for defense cooperation." Javan 1 January 2001.

nuclear reactor technology; that Iran could prevent NATO from expanding into Central Asia; and that Iran could be used as a bulwark against US' and Turkish cooperation in the Caspian region and the growing US influence in Central Asia.⁸⁰

Although US officials have demanded of Russia assurances that any Russian-Iranian arms sale would not lead to the transfer of nuclear weapons technology or improvement of Iran's Shahad-3 missile, in practical terms, Russia is eager to gain access into Iran's \$10 billion budget surplus due to higher oil prices.⁸¹ However, despite the agreement to sell arms to Iran, Russia is not unconcerned about what the growing relationship could lead to.

The debate over Mr. Putin's headlong rush to capture the Iranian market for Russia's beleaguered arms and energy industries is not yet as intense as the American reaction to it...but a sense of danger is growing based in part on the fear that Iran's moderates will lose power, putting Russian weapons in the hands of hard-liners who might point them at Central Asia or use them to incite Russia's Muslim population.⁸²

This apprehension in Russia is also fueled by the perceived uneasiness of relations between the Washington and Moscow, as the Bush administration pressures Iran over its "support for terrorism, and Tehran's efforts to develop long-range ballistic missiles and weapons of mass destruction."⁸³ Andrei Kozyrev, former Russian Foreign Minister under President Boris Yeltsin, pointed out that while Russia has no other choice but to do business with Iran, it should do so in while addressing US' concerns about the spread of dangerous weapons technologies.

In the first meeting between Russian President Putin and US President Bush on 16 June 2001, the issue of arms proliferation was broached by President Bush. The United States suspects Russia of shipping high-grade aluminum, used to produce uranium, to Iran. Although the summit did not produce conclusive results, both presidents agreed to commission ministers to begin working on a new security framework taking into account

⁸⁰ Ibid

⁸¹ Geneive Abdo. "Russia renounces ban on Arms to Iran: Military and Technical Cooperation pledged." International Herald Tribune. 29 December 2000.

⁸² Patrick E. Tyler. "Debate rises in Russia over Arms Sales to Iran; Some say Putin is aiding Potential Enemies." International Herald Tribune. 17 March 2001.

⁸³ Ibid

the threats from “rogue” nations such as North Korea, Iraq, and Iran. “We want Russia to be a partner and an ally, a partner in peace, a partner in democracy, a country that embraces freedom,”⁸⁴ President Bush said at a news conference on 15 June 2001. President Putin, reflecting President Bush’s sentiments, said after the summit that the two countries “are not enemies, they do not threaten each other and they could be fully good allies...they bear a special responsibility for maintaining peace and security in the world, for building a new architecture of security in the world.”⁸⁵

Although Russia sees Iran as a market for its arms and energy industries for pragmatic reasons, there is caution in Moscow on selling or providing technologies to a state that could turn those technologies against Russian interests. Russia shares the responsibility along with the other countries in the region to keep the states in Caucasia and Central Asia independent and stable. Taking into account the concerns of the United States, President Putin pledged to begin work on a new security framework that would include the proliferation of weapons in Central Asia and Caucasia while ensuring that the United States understood Russian concerns over US actions in the region where Russia still considers itself to be a major power.

I. CONCLUSION

Because of the United States’ stated goal of securing the sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity of the states of Central Asia and Caucasia, the US has engaged Turkey to further American influence into the region. US diplomacy has focused on the formation of democratic political institutions, market economic reform, regional cooperation, and responsible security policies. Although the United States has not been successful in all areas, American influence into the region is progressing slowly due to America’s influence on Turkey and Turkey’s pipeline politics. While this has progressed the development of the region’s states through a secular Middle Eastern model, growing US and Turkish influence in the region has alarmed Iran and Russia.

In the past two decades, the United States has sought to isolate Iran from becoming a factor in world dynamics. However, with the election of reformer President Mohammed Khatami in Iran in June 2001, and with growing pressure to lift sanctions

⁸⁴ “Bush wants Russia to be a ‘Partner’.” The Associated Press. 15 June 2001.

⁸⁵ “Analysis: US-Russia Relations atop Diplomatic Agenda.” Reuters. 17 June 2001.

against Iran from the domestic energy industry, President Bush has not ruled out the possibility of rapprochement with the Islamic republic. The Iranian presence in Central Asia and Caucasus has been largely mitigated due to America's economic policies in isolating Iran and not allowing the country the substantial revenue to develop economic ties within the region that would further Iran's influence. Only reforms in Iran and American perception of the Persian Gulf power will determine if Iran will become a constructive, dynamic factor in US foreign policy in Central Asia and Caucasus.

Understanding the role Russia has played in the region's history and understanding that Russia is still a power in Caucasus and Central Asia, the current administration seeks to engage Russia in building security within the region while mitigating the proliferation of weapons that could be detrimental for both states' interests. However, because of the commercial interests of both countries in the energy rich Caspian, the two states may find themselves in competition to harvest the riches of the region.

US influence through its foreign policy in the region has grown slowly. With complex relationships with Russia, Turkey, and Iran, the United States will remain engaged in this new Great Game in Caucasus and Central Asia to further American geopolitical interests within the region.

Competition between the regional powers, however, is not limited to the economic field. As influence from the regional powers grow, the possibilities for conflict, even military confrontation, multiply. The extreme possibility of armed conflict can readily be seen in a case study of the continuing dispute between Armenia and Azerbaijan over the region of Nagorno-Karabakh. As shown in the following chapter, the problems of ethnic divisions within the sovereign borders of Azerbaijan grew to include not only the belligerent states but also the regional powers Turkey, Iran, and Russia. The threat to US interests in the area was sufficient to prompt US involvement. As the regional powers competed to promote national interests, secure borders, and expand influence into the region, the new Great Game took a dangerous turn which pitted a nuclear armed, former superpower against a US ally and member of NATO.

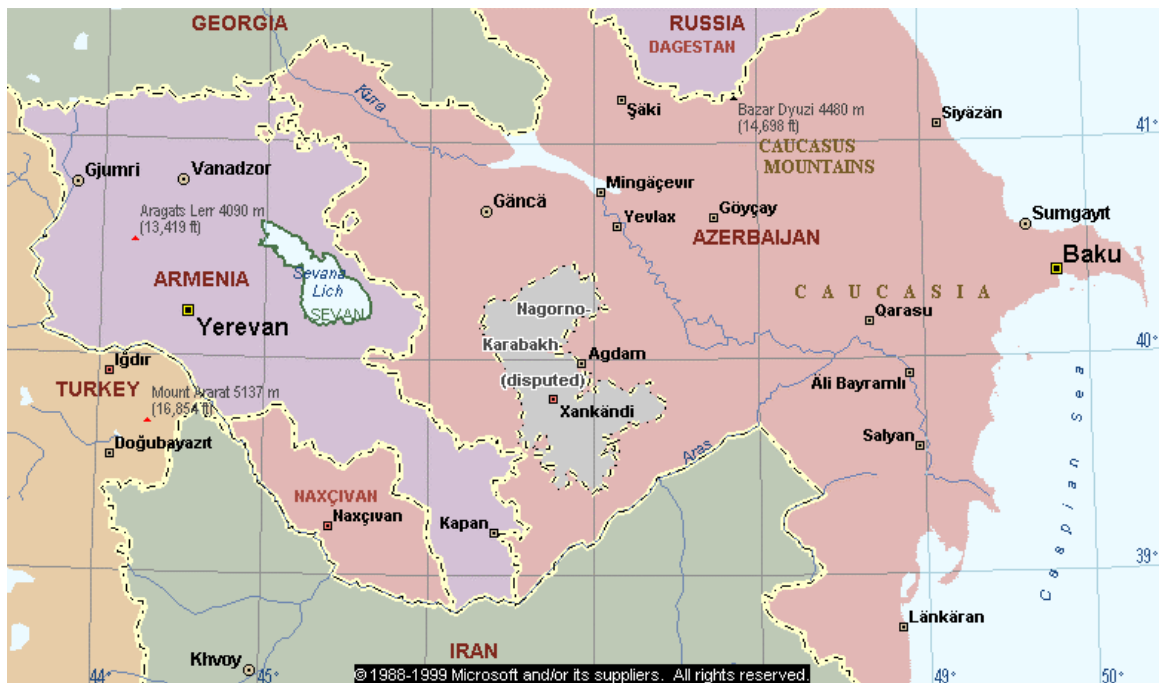


Figure 2. Nagorno-Karabakh (From Microsoft Encarta Reference Suite 2000)

IV. THE NAGORNO-KARABAKH CONFLICT

A. INTRODUCTION

With the breakup of the Soviet Union and the independence of the former Soviet states of Azerbaijan and Armenia in 1991, the dispute between the Armenians and the Azerbaijanis over the Nagorno-Karabakh region escalated into open warfare between the two new republics in the autumn of that year. After a cease-fire took hold in May 1994, the Azerbaijani government began to attract investment into the region from Western oil companies seeking to tap into Azerbaijan's energy reserves beneath the Caspian Sea. Political interests soon followed economic interests as the governments of Europe and the United States sought to lessen their dependence on oil supplies from the volatile Persian Gulf and to support the development of independent states in the former Soviet Union. However, even after the cease-fire, the conflict simmered under the surface as the Christian Armenian populace in Nagorno-Karabakh still sought independence from predominantly Muslim Azerbaijan. With the continuing conflict arraying various foreign powers against each other, the dispute serves as a dangerous precedent for future conflict among the regional powers that could lead to a wider war in Central Asia and Caucasia – one that could involve the United States against nuclear-armed Russia.

With Western interest in the region on the rise, new momentum was given to finding a resolution to the Nagorno-Karabakh dispute, and the Azerbaijani government was emboldened with the belief that Western governments along with Turkey would help it achieve diplomatically what it had failed to achieve on the battlefield.⁸⁶ Stability within the region would serve the objectives of outside powers as they seek to develop the region economically. However, the entrance of Western powers has complicated rather than improved the situation, as competition between regional powers for influence into Caucasia has grown.

Two blocs have evolved. Western influence through the United States and Turkey has increased to develop the region's economic potential and to support the independent political development of the Caucasian and Central Asian states along

⁸⁶ Michael Croissant. The Armenia-Azerbaijan Conflict (1998): Praeger Publishers: 132

Russia's southern border. Opposing this intrusion into the region, both Russia and the Islamic Republic of Iran have sought to lessen the growing influence of Western powers in the region they regard as within their spheres of influence. With competing interests and objectives, the United States and Turkey have found themselves in conflict with Russia and Iran as both blocs seek to influence and to develop the region to the advantage of their state interests. The actions of both blocs in the current Armenian-Azerbaijani dispute serve as an example of the growing competition between the powers. How each bloc deals with the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict has set a potentially dangerous precedent for the other states of the former Soviet Union in their individual developments as independent states in their relations with foreign powers.

B. THE DIVIDED REGION

Situated strategically between Europe, Asia, and the Middle East, Caucasia, over the centuries, has been subjected to foreign conquests, and continues to be fragmented along ethnic and cultural lines. Human migration, competition between surrounding states, and expansion by more powerful neighbors has had a great impact upon the development of perceptions and upon the self-identity and historical experience of the peoples of the Caucasia, including Nagorno-Karabakh.⁸⁷

For the Azeris, the effects of migrations and imperial rivalries led to a close identification with two powers that ruled them historically – Turkey and Iran. “By the end of the eleventh century, the early Azeris looked culturally toward Iran, religiously toward the larger Muslim world, and linguistically and ethnically toward the Turkic world.”⁸⁸ In contrast, these same historic migrations and imperial rivalries led to the rise of a distinct Armenian identity. This was very evident in Nagorno-Karabakh.

When the Sassanid presence in Transcaucasia was usurped by that of the Arabs in the seventh century, the Armenians of mountainous Karabakh continued to preserve their traditions and cling to a semi-autonomous existence while the rest of their countrymen were befallen by foreign rule. Over the next one thousand years, this precedent of Armenian autonomy was upheld, making Nagorno-Karabakh the only part of historic Armenia “where a tradition of national identity

⁸⁷ Ibid, p. 4

⁸⁸ Ibid

was preserved unbroken until the medieval period.” Thus, the Armenians’ strong emotional and nationalistic attachment to the land is clear.⁸⁹

However, Azeri scholars refuse to accept the Armenian claim that the inhabitants of Nagorno-Karabakh have been ethnically Armenian since earliest times. These scholars argue that “beginning in the eight century, immigrating Armenians forced the cultural, linguistic, and religious assimilation of the indigenous Albanian population of Karabakh...modern Armenian inhabitants of Nagorno-Karabakh are not Armenians per se, but are Armenianized Albanians, and thus, Azerbaijanis.”⁹⁰

The relations between the two peoples remained peaceful throughout the centuries. However, the divisions between the two groups were manifested during the period of Russian rule beginning in 1805, as Azeris perceived that the Armenians were treated as a privileged class by the conquerors. Nagorno-Karabakh became a region of contention as each side laid claim to the area. Relations soured between Armenians and Azeris over Nagorno-Karabakh in the late 19th and early 20th century. This growing quarrel briefly flared into open conflict at the end of the First World War before being suppressed under Soviet rule for most of the 20th century.

After Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev initiated reforms in the Soviet Union in the 1980’s, nationalist movements began in many of the Soviet republics. Amid this climate, the Soviet of People’s Deputies of Nagorno-Karabakh passed a resolution by a vote of 110-17 requesting the region’s transfer to the Armenian SSR on 20 February 1988. The Soviet Central Committee in Moscow responded negatively to the request, though the Gorbachev regime offered some concessions to the Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh. Although the prospect of increased economic, social, and cultural developments was welcomed, any measure short of full union was inadequate for the growing nationalistic fervor in Armenia and in the disputed region, and the conflict simmered under the surface for another three years before independence was given to both Azerbaijan and Armenia in 1991.

⁸⁹ Ibid, p.11

⁹⁰ Ibid, p.11-12

C. AZERBAIJANI AND ARMENIAN SECURITY

After the breakup of the Soviet Union, Nagorno-Karabakh continued to be viewed by Azeris as a historically vital and inseparable part of Azerbaijan. While a perceived challenge to Azerbaijan's territorial integrity continued from the Cold War after independence, the threat of an internal challenge to the new state's boundaries grew.

Unlike Armenia, which is mostly ethnically homogenous, Azerbaijan is a conglomeration of peoples of varying ethnicity, language, and religion and confronts the same internal challenges of ethnicity that pose problems for its Central Asian neighbors across the Caspian Sea. Besides the Armenian population within Nagorno-Karabakh, Azerbaijan contains three major ethnic groups. In the north are the Lezgin, a Sunni Muslim people who number close to 200,000 in a 1989 Soviet census. To the southeast are 20,000 Talysh, an Iranian people whose language belongs to the northwest Iranian language group, and in the southwest are 12,000 Kurds that share close ties to the Kurdish populations in Armenia, Turkey, and Iran. This diversity posed a number of potential problems for Azerbaijan's leaders after independence as the presence of large, diverse ethnic groups complicated the development of a sense of national identity for the newly independent republic.⁹¹ The independence movement in Nagorno-Karabakh region posed a significant challenge to the territorial integrity of the state, and set a precedent for how Azerbaijan's new leaders would deal with other independence movements that might arise from other ethnic groups within the bounds of the republic.

In light of the perceived dangers to Azerbaijan's territorial integrity posed by the republic's non-titular, non-Armenian minorities, the Nagorno-Karabakh problem heightened the sense of vulnerability of post-Soviet Azerbaijani leaders. With the Karabakh Armenians engaged in an active campaign to break away from the Azerbaijan and join Armenia, the precedent was set for similar movements to arise among the Talysh, Lezgin, and Kurdish peoples.⁹²

For Armenia, the realities of independence did not change the perspective that Nagorno-Karabakh represented a stronghold where a tradition of Armenian national sovereignty was preserved nearly unbroken. However, the official Armenian goal of achieving political union with Nagorno-Karabakh was changed to obtaining self-

⁹¹ Alexei Maleshenko and Yuri N. Zinin, p.105.

⁹² Croissant, p.68

determination for the Armenian population of the region. All claims to Azerbaijani territory were renounced, and Armenia refused to be the first state to recognize the Nagorno-Karabakh region as an independent republic, declaring that “such an act would appear to the world as an encroachment upon the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan.”⁹³ This new strategy was aimed at altering the international perception of the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict by seeking to avoid creating the impression that Armenia had any designs on the territory of Azerbaijan, thereby making Armenia a direct party to the Nagorno-Karabakh dispute. The Armenian government could now deny direct involvement in hostilities and could argue that Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians should be allowed to represent themselves in any future negotiations concerning the governing of the region.⁹⁴ Because of the region’s economic potential, however, the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh would not remain long as a dispute only involving the main belligerents, but would expand to include Turkey, Iran, Russia, and the United States.

D. REGIONAL DYNAMICS REVISITED

With the breakup of the Soviet Union in 1991, Turkey looked to Central Asia and Caucasasia as areas into which it could spread its influence. Turkey stressed its historical and linguistic ties with the Turkic peoples of the two regions, and portrayed itself as a model of a Westernized, secular, market-oriented democracy that the newly independent Muslim states could follow in their transition from Soviet rule. Other factors were also involved in determining Ankara’s increased presence within Central Asia and Caucasasia.

As the USSR declined in the late 1980’s, Turkey increasingly began to feel that its geostrategic value as an ally within NATO and to the West was declining. With the end of the Cold War, finding a new role for Turkey that would ensure its continued importance as an ally became extremely important. Becoming a bridge between the West and former Soviet republics of Central Asia and Caucasasia became the role Ankara adapted to fit within the framework of Western strategy.⁹⁵

An important calculation for Turkey was an economic one. The former Soviet republics became new markets for Turkish goods. Significantly, the states of Azerbaijan,

⁹³ Ibid, p.69

⁹⁴ Ibid, p.70

⁹⁵ Hyman, p.258

Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan possessed large reserves of oil and natural gas, resources that would alleviate Turkey's need for energy. Through its relations with the West, Turkey was offering the Caspian Sea littoral states access to European and American markets while providing investment opportunities to western companies seeking to develop the region's energy resources. Turkish pipelines and transit revenues from shipment of oil and gas to the Mediterranean Sea would also be lucrative for the Turkish economy.

The final calculation for Turkey concerned its security. For Ankara, Central Asia and Caucasia represented "a very important security region for Turkey. Therefore, the protection of political stability in these republics is a basic element of Turkey's policy regarding the Caucasus and the Central Asian republics."⁹⁶ Central to Turkish concerns was the potential of nationalist conflict close to its borders. The Armenian-Azerbaijan conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh represented such a conflict, and Ankara feared that a spillover of the violence between the belligerent states would force it to get directly involved to protect its territorial integrity, undermining regional peace and development. Hoping to control the border threat while developing ties, Turkey expanded its political and economic influence into Azerbaijan and into the region. Growing Turkish influence into the region, however, would be seen as a threat by Russia and Turkey's Middle East neighbor, Iran.

Like Turkey, Iran viewed the breakup of the Soviet Union as an opportunity to expand its influence into Central Asia and Caucasia. Iran, hoping to break away from the isolation that had been imposed on the country since the Iranian revolution, also sought to build new economic and political ties with the two regions, and offered the new republics access to the Persian Gulf through the use of the Iranian transportation network. Just as Azerbaijan served as a link for Turkey to the Caspian region and to Central Asia, Iran also saw the geopolitical importance of Azerbaijan for its designs on the region.

Iran also had its own security concerns. One concern is the existence of a significant number of Azeris living inside Iran's northern border. Although the 15 million Azeris are well integrated into Iranian society and show little desire to secede, the

⁹⁶ Croissant, p.59

matter is still a cause for worry for Tehran should there ever be a call for union with Azerbaijan from this Azeri population. In terms of security, any instability within neighboring Azerbaijan that could cause unrest among Iran's Azeri populace became a concern for Tehran. The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, so close to Iran's northern border, posed such a problem.

These cross-border ties with Iran also worried Azerbaijan. Although the Azeris hold linguistic ties with the Turks, many Azeris identify culturally and religiously with Iran. Azerbaijan is the only former Soviet republic where Shi'a Islam is practiced by the majority of the populace (70 percent). Because of this, Azerbaijan is perceived as potentially fertile territory for expansion of Iranian influence into Caucasia. Any significant Iranian influence in Azerbaijan would allow Tehran to block any Turkish designs in the Caspian region and into Central Asia.⁹⁷ However, for both Turkey and Iran, any calculations into Central Asia and Caucasia would have to take into account Russian influence in the region, as Russia still regarded all its former republics as within its sphere of influence.

Russian interests within Central Asia and Caucasia have been framed in terms of Russian security and strategic goals. A broad consensus has emerged in Russia around the concept that the former Soviet states in Central Asia and Caucasia are part of a sphere of vital interests for Russia within which Moscow has responsibilities to act to maintain peace and security.

Most Russian political and military leaders view the Transcaucasus as a key region of the "Near Abroad" due to its position both as a key land bridge among Europe, Asia, and the Middle East and as a crucial border area along Russia's Caucasian underbelly. What follows from this perception are two primary Russian geostrategic interests in the Transcaucasus: The maintenance of stability on the Russian Federation's southern flank and the expansion and consolidation of Russian influence in the Transcaucasus at the expense of other international actors.⁹⁸

Since the breakup of the Soviet Union, Russian leaders have shown concern over the potential for ethnic conflict in Caucasia. Accompanying this concern has been focus on the potential rise of Islamic fundamentalism in the former republics. Russia fears that

⁹⁷Rashid, p.61

⁹⁸ Croissant, p.64

Islamic extremism, once rooted in the southern republics, could also grow among Russia's significant Muslim population, thereby threatening the territorial integrity of Russia.

Underlying Russia's need for stability in the region is the perceived need to maintain Russia's predominance across its former republics. In order to achieve this goal, a number of conditions have to be met: Russia must become the chief intermediary between the former Soviet states and the outside world; no other country or international organization can be allowed to rival the influence of Russia in the region; the rise of potential threats to Russian security or ascendancy must be prevented; Moscow must become the sole peacemaker and peacekeeper in Central Asia and Caucasia; and, lastly, the former republics have to be maintained within Russia's sphere of economic influence. When applied to Caucasia and the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, these conditions dictated the Russia must be engaged deeply in the region. Russia must achieve a position of prominence in the foreign policies of both Armenia and Azerbaijan and must attempt to resolve the regional conflict while constraining the growth of foreign influence into the region and building it's own political and economic links with the two republics.⁹⁹

In summary, Turkey, Iran, and Russia, after 1991, each pursued geopolitical goals in Central Asia and Caucasia. Although many motives for the expansion of each country's influence are grounded on security concerns, each of the regional powers also sought to gain from their relationships with the former Soviet republics through political and economic ties. With each country pursuing its own interests, it was inevitable that conflict in whatever form would occur between the regional powers. The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict became a focus for the foreign policies of Turkey, Iran, and Russia, as each sought to gain influence in the region while serving as a mediatory or as a direct actor. The conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh would provide a precedent on how these regional powers, along with the United States, would deal with conflict in Central Asia and Caucasia.

E. 1991-1994

In the autumn of 1991, the Armenian leadership in Nagorno-Karabakh proclaimed the independence of the Nagorno-Karabakh republic, and called for its recognition from

⁹⁹ Ibid, p.66

Azerbaijan and Armenia. Military hostilities again erupted between the Armenian militias defending the region and the Azeri military. In March 1992, after the success of Armenian troops in capturing the strategic city of Khodjaly, Azeri President Ayaz Mutalibov resigned under pressure from his opponents. The Azeri forces, poorly organized and disjointed, suffered numerous defeats and lost the strategic city of Lachin in May 1992.

The fall of Lachin allowed a physical corridor to be created between Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh, ending the isolation of the region from Armenia that had been imposed by Stalin in 1923, and turning Armenia, despite its diplomatic maneuvering to give the impression that it was not involved in the internal affairs of a neighboring state, into a direct actor in the conflict. However, the occupation of Lachin now meant that Armenian forces occupied Azeri territory, in clear violation of the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan.

Building on their success, Armenian forces attacked the Azeri autonomous republic of Nakhichevan in the same month as the capture of Lachin. This attack now brought the conflict to Turkey's border and threatened the physical link between Turkey and Azerbaijan. The offensive forced Ankara to react. Prime Minister Suleyman Demirel pledged unspecified aid to Nakhichevan, and the Turkish Foreign Ministry issued a warning to Armenia. Although there was little indication that Turkey was preparing for military action, the Turkish action prompted a response from Russia.

In a clear reference to Turkey, the CIS Joint Armed Forces warned on 20 May that "third party intervention in the dispute [between Armenia and Azerbaijan] could trigger a Third World War."¹⁰⁰ The basis for the warning was the Treaty of Collective Security concluded in Tashkent on 15 May between Russia, Armenia, and four of the former Soviet republics. According to the provisions of the treaty, an attack on Armenia would be treated as an attack on Russia. Significant to this development was the fact that any conflict involving Turkey could conceivably bring in NATO and the United States.

Although the situation in Nakhichevan subsided after Turkey's warning to Armenia, the unease showed by Russia and Turkey demonstrated the new regional

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, p.81

dynamics in Caucasia. For the Turks, the attack on Nakhichevan was not just an attack on ethnic kinsmen but also a challenge to Ankara's ability to project power into the region. For the Russians, Turkey's warning proved the potential of a wider regional war and challenged Moscow's ability to hold influence in an area of major geostrategic importance to Russia.¹⁰¹

In June 1992, presidential elections were held in Azerbaijan and were won by Abulfaz Elchibey. Elchibey had won on the platform that he would assert Azerbaijan's sovereignty and territorial integrity by settling the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict to the benefit of Azerbaijan. The military was quickly reorganized, and a relatively successful campaign by the Azeri army managed to capture some of the lost territory. Elchibey internationalized the conflict, believing that participation from the United States, Britain, France, and the OSCE would benefit Azerbaijan in any peace negotiations.¹⁰²

In the spring of 1993, local Armenian forces from Nagorno-Karabakh counterattacked with great success against the Azeri forces. Armenian units captured 18 villages and began a siege of Fizuli, an Azeri district capital 20 kilometers north of the Iranian border. Under increasing domestic pressure to take action in Azerbaijan, Turkey reacted, this time, with a show of force. The Turkish Third Army, based in eastern Anatolia, was put on alert and moved into positions along the Armenian border. At the United Nations, Turkey's envoy warned that "the Turkish government will take every measure, up to and including military measures, to repulse Armenian aggression."¹⁰³ Anticipating a Turkish attack, Armenia reinforced its border with Turkey with elements of the Seventh Army, still controlled by Moscow and staffed partly with Russian soldiers.

As tensions grew between Turkey, Armenia, and Russia, Iran viewed the fighting in the Fizuli district with alarm. Fearing the possibility of a descent of thousands of Azeri refugees into its northern border, creating instability with Iran's own Azeri populace, President Rafsanjani stated that "the fighting close to the Iranian border is now

¹⁰¹ Ibid, p.82

¹⁰² Maleshenko and Zinin, p.107

¹⁰³ Croissant, p.87

affecting Iran's security [and that] a more serious stance would have to be adopted should the situation continue.”¹⁰⁴

The situation continued to deteriorate until the UN Security Council passed Resolution 822 on 30 April 1993. The first Security Council resolution concerning the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, Resolution 822 called for an immediate cease-fire and for the prompt withdrawal of all occupying forces from Azerbaijan. Additionally, the resolution defended the inviolability of international borders while designating the OSCE as the international body through which Armenia and Azerbaijan were encouraged to negotiate.

The cease-fire between the belligerent states was short lived, as Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians took advantage of a change of leadership in Azerbaijan to launch another offensive in June. Heavy fighting soon reached the Iranian border, and approximately 200,000 refugees, cut off from escape into eastern Azerbaijan, began to move towards the northern border of Iran.

Faced with this flood of war refugees, armed Iranian military units crossed the border into Azerbaijan in early September to create a 3-4 kilometer buffer zone. Tehran hoped to provide safe haven for the refugees where humanitarian aid could be administered while also preventing the influx of Azeris into its northern region.

Alarmed by the renewed Armenian offensive and the actions of the Iranian military in what could be interpreted as an invasion, Turkey again reinforced its border with Armenia with 50,000 troops. However, diplomatic overtures again prevailed as Turkey exercised caution towards the Iranian movements and acquiesced to the Iranian incursion, choosing instead to view the military action as necessary to alleviate the problem on the border shared by Azerbaijan and Iran.

Unlike Turkey, however, Russia showed disapproval to the Iranian military action. In a statement from the Foreign Ministry, Russia issued a warning to Iran.

In connection with the new development of the situation in the Armenia-Azerbaijani conflict, we have made it clear that, whatever their motivation, we cannot show any understanding or support for the actions of the Iranian side. The

¹⁰⁴ Ibid, p.88

fact that Iranian armed groups have crossed the border into Azerbaijan will not only lead to a further escalation of the conflict, but pushes it dangerously close to the verge of internationalization.¹⁰⁵

Despite the dangerous escalation of the conflict between the regional powers, caution and diplomatic initiatives prevailed. However, tensions remained high, and a very real potential for a major regional war had narrowly been averted.¹⁰⁶ The security concerns and the geopolitical interests of Turkey, Russia, and Iran had prompted the governments of each state to consider military action to protect its interests. Although the militaries of the regional powers were not involved in any of the hostilities, the potential for future conflict still remained, as each state did not alter its interests and stance in Caucasia.

A growing international awareness of the possible consequences of expanded warfare in Caucasia prompted the UN Security Council to pass resolution 874. While calling for a cease-fire, Resolution 874 differed with other resolutions concerning the conflict in that it “urge[d] all states in the region to refrain from any hostile acts and from any interference or intervention which would lead to the widening of the conflict and undermine peace and security in the region.”¹⁰⁷ With this resolution, the United Nations hoped to encourage Turkey, Iran, and Russia to negotiate their differences in the region without resorting to violence and setting a precedent for future conflict in the former Soviet republics.

A final offensive by Azeri forces in late 1993 and early 1994 did gain some territory back from the Armenians. However, the Nagorno-Karabakh and seven Azeri districts still remained under Armenian control before an uneasy peace, which has held to this day, was achieved. It was under this atmosphere that the US began to increase its presence within Caucasia.

F. U.S. INVOLVEMENT

With the Caspian Sea’s potential to become an important energy source, Japan, Germany, France, Italy, the United Kingdom, and the United States have heightened their economic engagement in Caucasia and Central Asia through investment and joint

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, p.94

¹⁰⁶ Ibid

¹⁰⁷ Ibid

ventures. In September 1994, an \$8 billion contract was signed between Western oil companies and the State Oil Company of the Azerbaijani Republic (SOCAR). Total projected profits from the contract, which will produce an estimated 650 million metric tons of crude oil over a 30-year period, are projected to be around \$100 billion. 80 percent of the profits would go to the Azerbaijani treasury, allowing Azerbaijan to strengthen its economy and its military to match the Armenian military arrayed against it.¹⁰⁸

The United States did not limit its penetration of Caucasia to only economic means. NATO also sought to expand eastward as regional countries assumed an important role in the political and security calculations of Europe and the United States. Under the NATO Partnership for Peace program, joint training began between the militaries of NATO and the former Soviet republics. With this joint military training through NATO and with its economic policy of pipeline politics through Azerbaijan and Turkey, the US sought to isolate Iran and mitigate Russian influence in the area.

The United States increased its presence in Caucasia in 1996 in response to a Russian proposal for the limited division of the Caspian Sea into national sectors. The United States directly opposed the Russian proposal, supporting the division of the sea into sectors with no joint sovereignty and supporting Azerbaijan's need to limit Russia's control of the Caspian Sea. US direct engagement in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict was increased significantly in February 1997 when it joined France and Russia as co-chairmen of the Minsk Group, the organization that had been formed from the member states of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) to find a solution to the ongoing conflict. Before becoming a co-chair, the US had contended for a secondary role in the negotiations. With its ascension, Washington became an active mediator throughout 1997 and 1998.

Although the United States has not directly challenged Russia's position in the region in regards to Nagorno-Karabakh, US investment in Azerbaijan has caused concern in Moscow. In August 1997, Russian President Boris Yeltsin criticized the United States for declaring that Caucasia was within the US zone of interests. Although US officials

¹⁰⁸ Ibid, p.115

responded by stating that Washington's only interest was in promoting genuine independence for the states in the region, Russia continues to be very wary of the emerging US influence within the geopolitical environment of Caucasasia.¹⁰⁹ The United States, despite Russian discouragement continued to expand its interests and sphere of influence within Caucasasia through direct action and through its NATO ally Turkey.

G. U.S. DIPLOMATIC INITIATIVES

In April 2001, US Secretary of State Colin Powell along with the President of Armenia, Robert Kocharyan, and the President of Azerbaijan, Heydar A. Aliyev, met in Key West, Florida to seek an end to the ongoing conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh. Although the details of the discussion remain confidential, both presidents were optimistic following the conclusion of the talks, expressing such sentiment to US President George W. Bush in a meeting at the White House. Final settlement would allow the return of refugees from the war-torn region, the reopening of borders, and the resumption of trade and commerce. President Aliyev, encouraged by the progress of the negotiations, expressed his support of the intensified US involvement in the peace talks. "We are hopeful that the United States of America and other co-chairs will intensify their efforts in order to achieve peaceful resolution to the conflict."¹¹⁰

For the United States, the reason for the direct involvement as a mediator in the conflict continued to be access to the oil in the Caspian region. In an agreement with Azerbaijan in November 1999, the two countries along with Turkey agreed to build a pipeline from Baku to the Turkish Mediterranean port of Ceyhan. The pipeline's route would cross over Azerbaijan and Georgia, and avoid any territory controlled by Russia or Iran. Stability in the region, brokered by the United States, would allow easier access to the region's resources through pipelines like the Baku-Ceyhan pipeline while serving to enhance US influence and prestige and allowing the US "to expand the zone of democracy and free markets eastward."¹¹¹ This growing influence, however, would come at the expense of Russia and Iran. Completion of the Baku-Ceyhan pipeline by

¹⁰⁹ Raymond Garthoff. "Russian Election; Putin's unformed policies promise measured change." Los Angeles Times. 2 April 2000.

¹¹⁰ Reuters. "Bush Encourages Resolution of Conflict in Oil-Rich Region." The New York Times. 10 April 2001.

¹¹¹ John Daniszewski. "Both Sides suffer as War Torn Caucasus Enclave lies in limbo." Los Angeles Times. 9 April 2001.

2004 would take away transit revenues from Russian pipelines already operating in Azerbaijan while mitigating the effects of Russian influence in the area. Future pipelines would continue to harm Russian influence in Azerbaijan. US sanctions against Iran as well as the fact that the new pipeline would bypass any Iranian controlled territory would ensure that the US could continue the isolation of Iran from the region.

Despite the continued unease of Russia on the growing role of the US in the conflict, the Russian, French, and American delegates, co-chairmen of the Minsk Group, seemed to find a common goal in trying to achieve peace in the volatile region. “American, Russian, and French diplomatic aims often collide. But on the topic of Nagorno-Karabakh, the three share an increasing desire to end the state of tension and blockade that knots up what once was, and could be again, one of history’s greatest crossroads.”¹¹² “All the parties to the discussion agree that peace will bring considerable benefits to the region, to the peoples of both countries and to the entire South Caucasus region and beyond.”¹¹³

For Russia, the immediate benefits to an end to the conflict include allowing Russia to engage in a higher volume of commerce with both countries without political restraints imposed by its alliance with Armenia, and the securing of a north-south trade route from Russia to Iran and the Persian Gulf.¹¹⁴ Despite continued US actions to isolate Russia through its pipeline politics, Russian long-term aims - stronger influence over the former Soviet republics, a goal it had sought since the initiation of peace negotiations in May 1994 - remained the same. A peaceful resolution to the conflict would allow Russia to continue to pursue its geopolitical interests while maintaining the security of its southern border.

Although Russia and the United States seemed to come to agreement over the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and no misgivings of the April 2001 Key West talks were heard from Turkey, Iran continued to be secluded from the negotiations. Peace in the

¹¹² Ibid

¹¹³ Reuters. “Bush Encourages Resolution of Conflict in Oil-Rich Region.” The New York Times. 10 April 2001.

¹¹⁴ John Daniszewski. “Both Sides suffer as War Torn Caucasus Enclave lies in limbo.” Los Angeles Times. 9 April 2001.

region, achieved in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and sought through cooperation among the regional powers and the United States, may actually serve each state despite the perception of competing geopolitical interests and of the loss of influence.

H. CONCLUSION

The Nagorno-Karabakh dispute has set a potentially dangerous precedent for how the regional powers in Central Asia and Caucasia will deal with future conflicts. Despite the current cooperation between Turkey, Russia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, and the United States, there were occasions during the war between 1991 and 1994 when the possibility of a bigger regional war involving a NATO member and a former nuclear-armed superpower was high.

Because of their geopolitical interests, their need for security, and the economic and political potential of Central Asia and Caucasia, Russian, Turkish, and Iranian goals in the two regions have clashed and will continue to clash. The growth of US influence in the area has not mitigated the threat of future conflict but has rather raised the level of competition, as Russia tries to keep whatever residual influence it has on the region, and Iran tries to expand its power.

Although there is optimism on continued cooperation between the regional powers as seen in the peace negotiations over Nagorno-Karabakh, there may be a future conflict in the developing states of Central Asia and Caucasia where the regional powers, along with their allies, are unable to resolve their differences through peaceful means and are drawn instead into a larger regional war. With ethnic, cultural, religious, and linguistic ties; with competing geopolitical interests; and with complex regional dynamics, the possibility of such a war cannot be discounted.

IV. CONCLUSION

After their independence in 1991 due to the collapse of the Soviet Union, the governments of the Central Asian states of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan, and the Caucasian state of Azerbaijan faced serious political, economic, ethnic, and religious challenges as they sought to build institutions that would provide them the stability they needed to secure their new nations. With ethnic, cultural, historic, linguistic and religious ties with the Middle East, the governments of these Central Asian states and Azerbaijan looked to the Middle East to aid in their development.

The ethnic diversity of each of the states contributed to the problems the regimes faced, as each state tried to build a national identity separate from ethnicity. Many of the ethnic groups have ties to the Middle East and the majority share the religion of Islam with their Middle Eastern neighbors. As Islamic influence grew through the encouragement of Middle Eastern states, the Central Asian governments increasingly became insecure against the mounting power of the Islamists, and responded with repressive measures while mitigating the influence of Middle Eastern powers in their states. Encouraged by the West that feared the growth of a fundamentalist state in Central Asia, the governments excluded Islamic groups from political participation and continued their repressive measures against the perceived threat.

The Central Asian states and Azerbaijan, however, still pursued foreign aid from their Middle Eastern neighbors. In Turkey, they found a secular model that would not threaten to spread Islamic fundamentalism and would allow the states access to the West and the United States. The United States, through Turkey, began expanding its influence into the region by using “pipeline politics” to project its economic power.

With its foreign policy, the US hoped to mitigate Iranian influence and the growth of Islamic fundamentalism into the region while moderating the influence of Russia, the former hegemonic power in the region. Iranian influence into the region was largely contained by US foreign policy, though the possibility does exist for future rapprochement. In regards to Russia, the US has managed to engage Russia to build

security within the region. However, because of competing national interests, friction between the emerging regional powers and the United States may not be limited to the political and economic field.

As exemplified by the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh, the ethnic diversity and ties each Central Asian state and Azerbaijan have with foreign powers could cause the escalation of a local dispute into a regional war. The geopolitical interests and security of the Middle Eastern powers of Turkey and Iran are intimately tied to events in Central Asia and Caucasasia. Russia, always wary of events in its southern flank, will continue to be engaged in the region to secure its borders and advance its national interests. The growth of US influence in the area has not mitigated the threat of future conflict but has raised the level of competition.

Because of their shared ethnic, cultural, historical, linguistic and religious ties, the Central Asian states and Azerbaijan will continue to rely on the Middle East for their development. Turkey and Iran, historic Middle East powers within the region have expanded their influence. The US, through its ally, Turkey, has also gained influence at the expense of the former regional power, Russia. However, this complex, evolving relationship could lead to future conflict. Any country that has an interest in Central Asia and Caucasasia must understand this relationship.

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